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General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

3rd meeting
Thursday, 7 June 2001, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

Agenda items 8, 9 and 10 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Omar Ali Juma, Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Juma (United Republic of Tanzania): I would like to commend you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over this special session, which we all hope will have great bearing on the status of global human settlements.

I also avail myself of this occasion, on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, to commend the United Nations for organizing the series of meetings which culminated in the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul five years ago. I am personally gratified by the opportunity to be the representative of President Benjamin Mkapa, both at Habitat II in Istanbul and now in this follow-up meeting.

The Habitat II Declaration and Agenda constitute a reaffirmation of the commitment to better standards of living within adequate settlements for all people. The United Republic of Tanzania fully subscribes to this ideal, and we have undertaken the following measures in compliance.

First, in conformity with the United Nations campaign towards secure land tenure, our National Land Policy aims at promoting a system that facilitates broad-based social and economic development by all sections of the community without endangering the ecological balance of the environment.

Secondly, the National Human Settlements Development Policy aims at attracting and harnessing existing initiatives in shelter delivery and investment in provision of infrastructure. It seeks to involve various actors in the public, private, informal and community sectors and will guide the rapid urban growth and the transformation of the settlement pattern.

Thirdly, the Government is undertaking a decentralization exercise with a view to strengthening local authorities, which are now considered as very effective institutions of development. A local government reform has been going on for more than five years now. We believe that, under this arrangement, local authorities will be able to fulfil their new role in a world of cities, towns and other

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settlements faced with the challenge of good urban governance.

Fourthly, also in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Government has made substantive progress through the implementation of the Sustainable Cities Programme, co-sponsored by Habitat and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Under the Programme, the Government is implementing an Environmental Planning and Management approach which seeks to promote partnership and participatory arrangements among city and town stakeholders.

Areas where this approach has been implemented effectively include community infrastructure upgrading, settlement regularization and solid-waste management. The results have been very positive. The programme is now being replicated in all towns in the country. These programmes are being presented at this meeting through the thematic committee. Tanzania is looking forward to sharing experiences and learning from others in this area, so as to better our performance. It is for this reason that I invite delegations to participate in our presentation.

The Government of Tanzania takes a holistic approach to sustainable human settlements. That approach was brilliantly summed up by our retired President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, when he said that poverty and environmental degradation are twins whose mother is ignorance. Indeed, poverty is at the core of unsustainable human settlements. It leads, among other things, to rampant rural-to-urban migration, putting enormous stress on both hard and soft infrastructure.

In this regard, we place the issue of shelter in the context of overall socio-economic development in order to improve the quality of life in both urban and rural areas. However, the implementation of these policies is not without constraints. They include the paucity of housing finance institutions, which calls for development of incremental and complementary forms of soft-terms credit for low-income housing projects; and the expansion of informal settlements, which is a great concern for both central and local Government authorities.

In this context, I therefore urge the international community to recognize the importance of assistance developing countries such as mine in reviving housing financial institutions.

While we are working on the second stage of our economic reforms, namely to translate our recent macroeconomic achievements into tangible national and household income benefits, the need for external assistance can hardly be overemphasized. We recognize, therefore, that enhancing international cooperation is necessary for improving human settlements development. We need to review, for example, the levels of official development assistance. The developing countries are calling for a reversal of the declining trend of official development assistance, to reach the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of the developed countries' economies.

Concerning the external debt problem, developing countries are calling for the immediate and full cancellation of all bilateral and multilateral debts. This should cover both poor countries in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative and those outside that initiative. This will release resources for the improvement of human settlements in developing countries. It is also very important to campaign for better trade terms, so that developing countries to benefit from international trade.

In conclusion, let me express Tanzania's expectation that this meeting will result in a commitment to enhance the capacity-building of the revitalized Habitat Centre in Nairobi, so that it can contribute effectively to the local initiatives of Member States. Tanzania is proud that this revitalized Centre is headed by one of our most illustrious citizens, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, whose credentials are widely acknowledged.

With these remarks, I wish this special session successful deliberations.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania for his statement.

I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable George Saitoti, Vice-President of the Republic of Kenya.

Mr. Saitoti (Kenya): The theme of this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly is the review of the implementation and progress of the Habitat Agenda. The session provides us with the opportunity to share experiences and to chart the way forward in line with the Millennium Declaration.

Kenya would like to reaffirm its full commitment to the goals and principles of the Habitat Agenda. We fully endorse the review and appraisal work that has been undertaken to assess progress and to identify problems and the emerging priorities.

Several preparatory meetings and conferences have been held in various places at the regional and international levels, focusing on monitoring progress and identifying common priority areas. The outcomes of these consultations have provided useful guidance for making decisions in areas for further initiatives. We thus commend the Executive Director and the secretariat of Habitat for the comprehensive report covering the activities over the past five years.

Kenya has made significant progress in creating an enabling environment to deal with social development and poverty eradication. The Government of Kenya has developed the long-term vision for poverty eradication, and that is the national poverty eradication plan, which runs to the year 2015. The plan is being implemented through a three-year rolling poverty reduction strategy that was prepared through an all-inclusive consultative process at all levels.

In the area of shelter, the Government, non-governmental organizations and other partners are addressing the issues of quality of life and safe living conditions in rural and urban areas. Specific initiatives include the dissemination of low-cost building technologies and materials, as well as the implementation of revised building by-laws and planning regulations. Deliberate efforts are being made to deal with the problems of slums and informal settlements. While some slum-upgrading projects are currently being implemented, a major programme for slum upgrading is being developed.

Let me outline some of the challenges that may impede quick realization of the Habitat Agenda objectives.

First, most of our countries are characterized by high levels of poverty. Africa, for example, carries a heavy burden of illiteracy, poverty and disease. Estimates of most human development indicators reveal that development has either stagnated or declined. As we renew our commitments to the Habitat Agenda, we must consolidate our efforts to reverse these undesirable trends.

In this regard, Kenya fully supports the initiative for establishing a global fund to fight poverty that is consistent with the Havana Declaration, and it fully endorses the Okinawa Declaration in which Japan made a commitment of $3 billion to fight poverty.

The implementation of the Habitat Agenda requires additional resources. Yet over the past decade official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries has been declining. Private foreign direct investments (FDI) have, on the other hand, increased substantially. For example, FDI flows to developing countries increased from $31 billion in 1990 to $171 billion in 1998, more than four times ODA assistance to developing countries. Unfortunately, much of this went to only a few developing countries outside Africa.

We therefore urge the international community to honour its obligations as enshrined in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda by scaling up contributions to the target level of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. Member countries should also work towards creating the conditions necessary to allow increased private financial flows.

The external debt problem afflicts many developing countries, as it affects overall development in several ways. Current estimates indicate that the ratio of debts to exports exceeds 396 per cent. This shows that Africa is one of the most heavily indebted regions in the world. The effects of debt on the provision of infrastructure and other social services, education and health care are clear. Whereas we appreciate and support the commitment of the international community in debt relief initiatives for highly indebted poor countries, its current application excludes several countries.

Africa accounts for about 75 per cent of HIV/AIDS cases in the world. Therefore, we cannot afford to ignore the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on our development efforts and the demand it creates on scarce national resources. We must take appropriate actions in responding to the effects of AIDS on individual families and communities, including the provision of decent housing to AIDS victims.

To respond effectively to the challenges posed by rapid urbanization in developing countries, participatory planning involving communities, non-governmental agencies and other Habitat Agenda partners is crucial. Well-functioning local authorities must of necessity be at the centre of all these. This

calls for decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities through devolution of power and establishing appropriate fiscal relations with the central Government, based on an agreed formula of tax collection and revenue sharing.

It has become apparent that with globalization the United Nations system will play an increasingly important role in the development agenda of member countries. We must, therefore, recognize that most of the development issues affecting our countries are likely to be considered within the United Nations system. There is need for a shared vision and common strategies to ensure full implementation of the priorities identified.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Kenya for his statement.

I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Makbule Ceco, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Albania.

Ms. Ceco (Albania): During the last decade, our country has made obvious progress in its road of democracy, civilization and Euro-Atlantic integration. Albanian society has reached important progressive developments and has experienced several dramatic events that have had their impact on the population, especially on the most vulnerable people.

The experience of 10 years of transition in Albania has demonstrated the population's huge support for the values of a democratic system and for the advantages of and possibilities for development through the growth of free initiative and the establishment of political, economic, financial and social conditions for the implementation of international standards for human rights and freedoms. Albanians have supported the democratization and development processes, being conscious of the perspectives they open to the country. They are also well aware of difficulties in achieving such objectives, especially the social cost of implementing economic reforms.

The transition period for Albania has been very difficult compared to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have joined the democratization process. This is due to its original circumstances and to the fact that the political class has not always been successful in finding the most efficient means and ways for reformation and development of Albanian society.

At the beginning of the 1990s Albania started to experience urbanization processes and vigorous urban growth. Those processes took place in conditions of slow development. Some of the reasons why our country's urbanization process was a serious economic, social, political and spiritual problem were the very high flow of emigration and internal migration, the deterioration of the health and social services system and the relatively low pace of the reform of that system, along with great economic differentiation and polarization and the consequent social exclusion of several groups within the population.

Turning to the demographic aspect, urban processes in Albania were reflected in population growth in cities and other urban areas. Meanwhile, quantitative urban growth was not compensated for or accompanied by the creation of living conditions in line with urban standards, or by an increase in the role and capacity of political, economic and cultural centres and institutions in urban peripheries. These urban peripheries have been transformed into major enclaves of poverty and problematic demographic growth. Lack of minimum living conditions and a scarcity of necessary infrastructure and of vital social services have been among the main concerns of my Government. The Albanian Government, in collaboration with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and with the Governments of some neighbouring countries, attaches high priority to the problems caused by uncontrolled urban growth and by internal migration. Recently, the Government has taken a number of legal, financial and institutional steps to solve problems related to the populations of the peripheries of large cities; it will not allow them to be treated as low-rank people.

We are also trying to lay a foundation for the new housing needs of the population based on the spread of urban culture and an urban value system. The quantitative aspects of urbanization are based on legal and economic actions; these will lead to the promotion of qualitative aspects of the urbanization process. We are creating a tradition of collaboration among Government and State institutions on the one hand and civil society, communities and private business on the other. That tradition and those efforts are supported by legal and financial measures.

Urbanization in Albania is a complex process: a combination of in-urbanization and ex-urbanization.

Another significant aspect of the urbanization process is sub-urbanization: the weakening economic impact of rural areas and their transformation — especially those areas in or near the suburbs of big cities — into parts of urban centres or metropolitan structures.

Emerging urban processes involve problems with respect to suitable conditions for settlement of the population. Economic and financial efforts are being made to support the right to human shelter, which is a fundamental human right. Albania is in the process of ratifying the revised European Social Charter and is giving consideration to the financial cost of implementing its standards.

Beyond the problems related to settlement and to the consequences of the economic situation at the beginning of the 1990s, the problems of attaining suitable human settlements are exacerbated by certain specific developments in our country. Apart from its human, political, economic and financial consequences, the collapse of the financial pyramids at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997 caused serious problems for the settlement of a considerable number of Albanian families. Compensation for that loss, which has a very high financial cost, is beyond my country's internal resources alone, yet it remains a priority for my Government.

Giving priority to emerging needs of the population that are a result of certain specific circumstances has delayed the preparation of long-term policies for the study and solution of the problems and consequences of uncontrolled urbanization and population settlement. We are moving towards overcoming these emergencies. The Albanian Government has prepared an action plan for its population settlement strategy, which is based on cooperation between central and local government, and among government, civil society, community and private business. The objective of this strategy is not only to support poor groups in the light of the economic, social and health conditions and payment capacities of families and individuals, but also to create conditions and opportunities for the programmed solution of the population's settlement problems.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mel Martínez, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development of the United States of America.

Mr. Martínez (United States of America): It is a great honour for me to be here representing the United States of America. I am the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, a member of the President's cabinet; and I happen to be a refugee to the United States.

The fact that I am a refugee is not so remarkable. The United States is a land of immigrants and refugees who, either searching for a better life for their families or fleeing oppression, came to our shores and helped build our nation. The fact that I am standing here today, however, as head of the United States delegation says a great deal about freedom and the remarkable opportunities offered by participation in a free society.

We call it the American dream, the freedom to pursue success and prosperity, however the individual defines it for himself or herself. But access to housing, equal opportunities in choosing a place to live and the right to own property and pass it on to our heirs are certainly at its core. As nations united through habitat, we share the dream of individuals leading full and productive lives through access to adequate housing, land, credit and basic services. In the five years since Istanbul, we have made remarkable progress towards meeting that goal.

An innovative alliance that brings together local, national, and international resources in Santo André, Brazil, has transformed living conditions and has brought hope to 16,000 residents who live in the poorest areas of that city.

In Thailand, the Government established a unique revolving fund that provides low-interest loans for housing and other community development projects. Today, Thailand's urban poor are building networks and partnerships that are improving the quality of life for residents in 53 of the country's 75 provinces.

My Government applauds those and other efforts that are translating the goals of the Habitat Agenda into real solutions helping real people. I am proud to say that we have also made strides here in the United States since we met five years ago in Istanbul. Today, we have more than 6 million new homeowners, and a record number of Americans have achieved homeownership.

The fundamental right to own property, including a home, is a foundation of our society. Two out of every three Americans own their own homes. We believe so passionately in the cause of homeownership

that every year, we celebrate one week in June — this week, coincidentally — as National Homeownership Week.

Expanding the number of homeowners remains a national priority, because we understand that homeownership is at the very root of good citizenship. It plays a vital role in creating strong neighbourhoods by turning short-term tenants into long-term community stakeholders. In helping families build real wealth, home ownership creates financial security and peace of mind. Home ownership also provides opportunities to build the economic strength of families to help elevate them out of poverty.

Having lived in one country where such opportunities are cherished and in another in which they are denied, I have a special appreciation for the homeowner and I consider the growth in home ownership to be one of the most important economic shifts of the past century. No matter where they live, no matter their income, everyone should have the opportunity to own their own home.

"Everyone" includes women. In the United States, we support without question the equal right of women to own property and to receive or give an inheritance. Most new homeowners did not simply write a check from a personal bank account. They had to finance their purchase. Therefore, access to credit is critical and the first of four cornerstones of the United States housing system. Over the past 35 years, we have enacted a powerful set of laws to ensure that no American who can afford to own a home is denied a mortgage. For this reason, the secondary markets are key — perhaps the key — to success in the housing system.

The federal Government serves as housing's second cornerstone, although its role is specific and appropriately limited. Operating openly and transparently, the federal Government offers a supportive framework within which the housing market operates.

Every citizen has the opportunity to help make the rules at the local level. This is the third cornerstone of the American housing system. Through local elections, their involvement in non-profit groups and public-private partnerships, individuals can help determine the decisions that affect housing in their own communities.

As the fourth and final cornerstone, homeowners and renters have a strong legal system to support them, one that ensures that their rights cannot be unjustly stripped away. While its role is vital, we recognize that Government does not have all the answers or a monopoly on compassion. President Bush is committed to working with community-based and non-governmental organizations, especially faith-based groups, to lift up the neediest among our citizens.

The United States is in many ways defined by the opportunities it affords its citizens. This says something very powerful about the benefits of freedom and maybe it helps explain why the American dream compels us to share the harvests of our opportunities.

Within the next three decades, more than 60 per cent of the world's citizens will live in urban settings, most of them in developing countries ill-equipped to handle the housing needs of so many people. Our urban centres in the United States have faced the problems of inadequate and unaffordable housing and we have decades of experience in creating solutions — not federal Government solutions, but solutions developed *in partnership by local authorities, private enterprise* and community organizations. We are eager to share what we have learned and we continue to reach beyond our borders to form strong partnerships with our global neighbours.

For 30 years, the United States worked with the Government of Chile and its private sector to develop a successful housing finance system. Now, through United States-sponsored conferences, workshops and technical assistance, other Latin American nations are learning how to modernize their finance systems based on this Chilean model.

The continued urbanization of South Asia has brought with it management challenges that my Government is actively helping to solve. We have successfully worked with key cities, such as Kathmandu, to plan for and finance improvements in urban environmental management.

In South Africa, the regional urban development office of the United States Agency for International Development is focused on energy-efficient housing and the need to bring electricity to those who have historically gone without it. Our work has been key in building alliances between national and local Governments and private entities.

These arrangements are hardly one-sided. Over and over again, we have been the beneficiaries when other countries developed urban management improvements and technological breakthroughs. This expertise is invaluable because, for all our progress, challenges remain for this particular nation. We are redoubling our efforts to close the home-ownership gap for minorities, to keep the inventory of federally assisted housing strong and viable and to shelter the homeless and lead them towards self-sufficiency. We are being wise stewards of our natural resources as our cities grow beyond their original boundaries. We are building strong schools, so that no child is left behind in the global, information-based economy.

> "Like stones rolling down hills, fair ideas reach their objectives despite all obstacles and barriers. It may be possible to speed or hinder them, but impossible to stop them."

These are the words of one of my favourite thinkers, José Martí. Despite the obstacles and barriers we sometimes find in our path, my country shares with members of this Assembly a commitment to the fair idea of secure, safe and adequate housing for all. We have made great strides and our progress cannot be stopped, but until democracy and freedom are truly allowed to bring out the best in all the world's citizens, we should not rest.

As we work together in search of answers, let us recognize that solutions dictated by Government will not work on their own. Instead, we must strive to expand self-sufficiency for individuals, to strengthen families and to empower communities to shape their own futures and their own destinies.

This goal is good for our countries, good for the international community, good for every individual who pursues a dream. Let it be our constant guide as we recommit ourselves to fulfilling the Habitat Agenda and carrying out the important work ahead.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Urban Development, Construction and Public Utilities of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Samaraweera (Sri Lanka): It is indeed a great honour for me today to have been given an opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka at this special session of the General Assembly.

First, let me extend to the General Assembly at this special session the warm felicitations of the President of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Chandrika Kumaratunga, who, in keeping with the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1996, has given topmost priority in our Government's "Vision 21" policy programme to sustainable human settlements development. Let me also take this opportunity to extend our special thanks to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his strong support for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. I would also like to convey our appreciation to Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

We, the States Members of the United Nations, have assembled here to review and appraise the progress made in the implementation of commitments made at Habitat II, to identify the obstacles and emerging issues relating to sustainable human settlements development and to set out future plans of action for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Sri Lanka country report, in fact, examines the progress made in the sphere of human settlements development since Habitat II in Istanbul six years ago. The global report presented by the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has identified the main areas of concern to be addressed at this special session for future action. I am very happy to report to this Assembly that the Government of Sri Lanka has been actively involved in translating the Habitat Agenda into action during the past five years, especially in promoting planned physical and urban settlement development.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees the right to adequate shelter. Accordingly, necessary policies and legislation have been introduced to facilitate the process of ensuring shelter for all. In order to ensure adequate shelter for all, Sri Lanka is now in the process of increasing its national housing stock through private-public partnerships, by encouraging individual house-builders by creating a conducive social market and legal environment, and by relocating slum- and shanty-dwellers in new sustainable and self-sufficient compact townships.

In the sphere of shelter development, basic guidelines and directions for the country's human settlements development extending over a period of

three decades beyond 2010 have been drawn up. The Presidential Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, which was initiated by the President of Sri Lanka in 1997 and is the first of its kind in post-independence Sri Lanka, has prepared a comprehensive plan for human settlement development at the national, provincial and local levels.

In fact, the urban population of Sri Lanka at present constitutes 30 per cent of the country's total population. It is likely to reach 45 per cent and 65 per cent by 2015 and 2030, respectively. Taking into consideration the trend in Sri Lanka's urban population growth, the Government has undertaken an extensive physical development plan for the next 30 years within the overall context of its national economic development strategy.

Also, the issue of substandard housing is one of the most serious development challenges faced by us in Sri Lanka today, as will most probably also be the case in the next decade. For instance, 51 per cent of Colombo's total population lives in slums and shanties, while only 42 per cent of the national housing stock is permanent. Therefore, improving the quality of the national housing stock, ensuring security of tenure, providing urban infrastructure, developing the capital and secondary housing markets, mobilizing public-private partnerships in shelter development to ensure sustainable human settlements, developing human resources and strengthening local authorities, including the empowerment of civil society, are some of the major challenges that Sri Lanka needs to address today.

To work on the shelter problem of the slum- and shanty-dwellers in Colombo — who, as I mentioned earlier, represent half of that city's population — an innovative, fully market-based, self-financing, voluntary rehousing programme with the full participation of the private sector and the community — which has been called a sustainable township programme — is being implemented. This imaginative programme will offer the urban poor an option to trade off the unencumbered land on which they live without a title for a modern apartment constructed within a compact township. This programme, which is already under way, envisages the construction of 50,000 such units by the year 2005. In addition to the sustainable township programme, the urban settlements improvement project and other supplementary plans are being implemented to target under-served settlements within the city of Colombo. The enabling shelter development programmes are also being promoted in other urban and rural areas and in the fisheries and plantation sectors, with a view to providing adequate shelter for all by the year 2010.

Sri Lanka believes that there must be a greater global partnership for cooperation in the fields of financial and technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of the developing countries so as to enable them to cope with the growing problems pertaining to human settlements development in an ever-urbanizing world. The real challenge before us in the urban millennium, if I may use a phrase utilized by the President in his opening address yesterday, is to demonstrate our political will to establish effective institutional mechanisms to implement the measures agreed upon here. But the political will of the developing countries will be reduced to a mere slogan unless the same will is mobilized within the developed countries to ensure a fair and regular flow of assistance to developing countries in order to achieve the common objectives of the Habitat Agenda.

On behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, let me emphasize that we are committed not only to implementing the Habitat Agenda, but also to consolidating our common mission with all the Member countries who are looking forward to a new order for ensuring international cooperation in the context of the rapidly expanding urbanization and globalization process.

In conclusion, I hope that the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly will be a great success.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Badia, Government Councillor for Public Works and Social Affairs of Monaco.

Mr. Badia (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): As President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, Mr. President, you are also presiding over this special session devoted, in accordance with resolution 53/180, to a review and overall appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This pleases us, because we are aware of and appreciate your abilities.

The current review and evaluation of the decisions of the Habitat II Conference in which we are engaged and which, we are certain, this special session will carry out successfully, should be an opportunity to

confirm with conviction and strengthen the commitments the international community undertook at Istanbul in June 1996. As stipulated in paragraph 7 of the Declaration adopted on that occasion,

> "As human beings are at the centre of our concern for sustainable development, they are the basis for our actions as in implementing the Habitat Agenda."

The authorities of my country, which is a city-State, unreservedly share, and are concerned about, the universal objectives set out in the Istanbul Declaration, which are aimed at making human settlements safer, healthier, more liveable, more equitable, more sustainable and more productive.

First of all, the Government of the Principality of Monaco would like to pay tribute to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for its work, and to congratulate it on its numerous and productive activities. The recently launched campaign in Nigeria, to which we wish every success, is an encouraging and enlightening example of that work.

His Serene Highness the Sovereign Prince of Monaco has always wanted the modernization of housing in the Principality not to overlook the social dimension, while integrating the principles of sustainable development at all levels through precise and careful management of the environment.

The Principality of Monaco has unique experience in the area of human settlements because of the major obstacle to its expansion posed by the smallness of its land area. For that reason, as it has developed economically, it has been compelled to promote a model of human settlements that is adapted to these conditions. This is often costly, and our human settlements are sometimes partially or totally built on land reclaimed from the sea. Its housing is likewise imbued with a social and humanitarian character.

In order best to satisfy the growing demand for housing, the Government of the Principality has, when it is not itself taking such action, for several decades encouraged the construction, in limited areas, of new functional buildings that are well integrated into the environment and that are equipped to counter the seismic danger to which the region is subject.

We now have over 80 public housing units out of every 1,000.

Because of the large number of tenants in the Principality, there exists a system of financial allowances that enables the neediest to have access to housing for which the rent is very moderate, regardless of the quality. If they wish, the elderly and handicapped can receive, regardless of their income, special housing facilities with medical support. Some recently constructed buildings consist of specially designed housing intended to enable the elderly to stay in their homes.

In addition, recent legislative measures make it easier for the State to intervene in protecting tenants from private landlords.

Another major concern guides the authorities of Monaco: maintaining the quality of and constantly improving public infrastructures, in particular the green spaces that now occupy more than 20 per cent of our land area. City cleanliness also receives constant attention from the public authorities, who are provided with substantial technical means to collect household and industrial waste on a daily basis and to maintain thoroughfares and areas for walking and leisure.

The work done to preserve air quality also deserves to be underlined. This involves maintaining a regular flow of road traffic to the extent possible, improving public transport, reducing pollution produced by motor vehicles and focusing continuous efforts on creating greater public awareness. Experimental initiatives have also been taken in this regard, such as the granting of a government subsidy to firms that use utility or commercial vehicles powered by electricity.

The treatment and evacuation of waste water has improved since the 1980s, thanks to a biological purification plant. The sludge from this plant is burned in the Principality's incineration plant for household waste. To inform the public of this initiative, as well as of the considerable costs linked to de-polluting waste water, it was deemed appropriate to indicate on water bills the amount applicable to this treatment technique.

The Government of Monaco has not confined itself to work carried out at the local or national level. In 1998 the Principality joined the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty. This international programme reflects the priorities on our agenda, and Monaco accordingly wished to make a financial contribution to it, the main objective being to improve living conditions in urban areas, particularly regarding

housing and the promotion of controlled strategies for urban development.

Through this programme, my country has also started to develop concrete bilateral cooperation with three cities that are members of the Alliance: Cotonou, Dakar and Essaouira. It is determined to continue and to strengthen this type of cooperation by expanding it to other cities and continents in the future.

Please be assured, Mr. President, of the strong interest and unqualified support the Government of the Principality attaches to this session, which, thanks to your great ability and the dedication of the members of the Bureau, will, we are convinced, be crowned with success. We hope that this special session will give rise to substantial progress, in particular through international action, to enable us to approach the goals set in Istanbul five years ago at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements: the eradication of poverty and better living conditions for all.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Bates Namuyamba, Minister of Local Government and Housing of Zambia.

Mr. Namuyamba (Zambia): On behalf of the Zambian delegation, I wish to join other delegations that have spoken before me in congratulating you, Mr. President, on being elected to preside over this important special session of the General Assembly for an overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). You can count on Zambia's active participation in the proceedings of this special session.

Today I stand here on behalf of the people of Zambia to reaffirm Zambia's continued commitment to the Habitat Agenda. We believe that the Habitat Agenda provides a vision for improving the quality of life of people throughout the world.

Our experience over the past five years of implementing the Habitat Agenda has revealed the comprehensiveness of the Agenda. Virtually any good urban development activity somehow finds a niche in it. It is this fact that makes the overall review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda an interesting experience. We all have tales to tell and lessons to learn, developed and developing countries alike.

Over the past five years we in Zambia have endeavoured to realize through various development programmes and projects the two themes of the Habitat Agenda: adequate shelter for all and the development of sustainable human settlements. In the field of shelter, we have made significant strides by empowering the Zambian people with their own houses. We have formulated and are implementing an innovative housing policy that has enabled sitting tenants to purchase houses that hitherto were owned by Government, local authorities and State-owned companies. As a result, the status of many Zambians has been transformed from tenant to landlord, virtually overnight.

Perhaps I should mention here that the Zambian housing policy was awarded the 1996 Habitat Scroll of Honour by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Our housing policy has not neglected the poor in our society. In addition to empowering our people in the conventional or formal housing sector, we continuously empower our people living in unplanned settlements by providing them security of tenure for their properties, including title to land.

For almost 30 years now, we have given people living in recognized informal urban settlements titles to the land and have allowed them to gradually build their houses. In 1974, we enacted a law, the Housing (Statutory and Improvement Areas) Act, which provides the legal basis for their security of tenure.

Our approach to adequate shelter for all and the development of sustainable human settlements has stressed the importance of community participation. Indeed, the Habitat Scroll of Honour was awarded to Zambia in recognition of the participatory and innovative manner in which we formulated the housing policy.

Experience has shown us that community participation in shelter and human settlements development engenders civic responsibility at the local level and enhances a sense of ownership regarding public projects carried out by the community.

We have also learned that if participation is to be effective, participants themselves must be enabled to participate. Zambia therefore supports the enabling strategy that underpins the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. When we talk about enablement, we are referring to capacity-building at all levels — local, national, regional and international.

In our assessment, the degree to which an activity of the Habitat Agenda is effectively implemented is dependent on the enabling environment created for it. The implementation of the Habitat Agenda is dependent on the enabling strategy created for it at all levels.

We are of the considered view that enablement is the entry point for implementing the Habitat Agenda. Consequently, while we wholeheartedly support the notion that the primary responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda rests with each State, we are also of the considered view that an enabling environment is essential at the global level if Member States are to effectively implement the Habitat Agenda.

How can Member States effectively implement the Habitat Agenda in an environment of overburdening external debt and poverty in which access to the international market is restrictive and the requisite new and additional resources for its implementation are not available?

The Habitat Agenda itself is full of recommendations about what needs to be done at the international level to ensure its effective implementation. We support these recommendations, and we believe that the international community also supports them. If they are not supported, commitment to the Habitat Agenda will become academic. It is our hope that the globalization that is taking place now will be part of the enabling process, rather than a process that stifles and overwhelms local initiatives.

Zambia supports all efforts aimed at strengthening the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) so that it can effectively play its assigned role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We therefore welcome the appointment of Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka to the position of Executive Director of Habitat. She brings to the Centre a wealth of experience which will enhance its performance. It is our hope that the Centre will now begin to receive the necessary financial support that it deserves through predictable and adequate funding to support its activities. We are also aware of initiatives by regional and other international organizations supporting the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. In this regard, we wish to welcome the initiative of the Commonwealth.

Finally, let me reiterate Zambia's commitment to the Habitat Agenda and our resolve to implement it within our limited resources.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Djéjouma Sanon, Minister Delegate for Habitat in the Ministry of Infrastructure, Habitat and Town Planning of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Sanon (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the General Assembly at the twenty-fifth special session, on human settlements. I should like, on behalf of the Government of Burkina Faso and my delegation, and on my own behalf, to express sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his colleagues, in particular the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). On a more general level, I should also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the entire United Nations system, including Habitat, and in particular to the preparatory committee, whose painstaking and conscientious work made possible the convening of this special session.

There is no need to point out the importance of this meeting. It provides an opportunity for the international community to proceed to an overall review and assessment of the implementation of the decisions taken at the Istanbul Conference five years ago.

In accordance with the commitments made at Istanbul, my country, Burkina Faso, has been working on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Our participation in the various preparatory processes reflects the commitment of my country's highest authorities to making the Habitat Agenda a framework for cooperation and exchange.

Providing adequate housing for all and developing sustainable human settlements are the primary objectives of the Habitat Agenda as far as my country is concerned, and I am pleased to be able to inform the Assembly about the progress that we have made.

With regard to housing and habitat, Burkina Faso, assisted by Shelter Africa, has embarked upon a programme for the construction of social housing. The first phase of the programme to promote and popularize the use of local construction materials — a programme known as LOCOMAT — which aims to provide greater

access for low-income sectors to decent housing and better living conditions, has just been completed. That programme, undertaken with assistance from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, has proved very satisfactory, from the scientific standpoint as well as in terms of its contribution to the construction of affordable housing. Those results encouraged us to request Habitat to become involved in the implementation of the second phase of the project.

Generally speaking, the issue of financing remains the stumbling block in our urban policies. We believe that this special session should help to remove that obstacle.

Good governance is necessary if we are to build a prosperous, responsible and cohesive society. Burkina Faso is therefore steadfast in its commitment to promoting a democratic way of life by ensuring political pluralism and respect for human rights as well as enhancing the participation of women in political life. Burkina Faso encouraged greater participation on the part of women in the local elections held on 24 September 2000, through advocacy work in favour of women with traditional religious and political authorities, and by increasing the awareness of political parties so as to achieve better representation of women in elections. That has made it possible to significantly increase the number of women elected to municipal councils; their presence has risen from 9 per cent in 1995 to 21 per cent in 2000.

Significant progress has also been made with the adoption of a statute on municipal employees and the organization of national and regional workshops, as well as of special workshops on decentralization strategies.

With regard to social development and poverty eradication, Burkina Faso has drawn up a framework document on combating poverty, which spells out the main objectives for the next decade: health, education, the construction of rural roads and the promotion of women.

This framework document, which was approved in 2000, was based on the work done by the Government since the adoption in 1995 of the Letter of Intent on Sustainable Development Policy and on the results of broader consultations held with all sectors.

Our goal is to create a favourable environment for the promotion of economic growth and to better enable people to participate effectively in bringing about and benefiting from such growth, with the emphasis on increasing their income and providing them with better access to basic social services.

My country is taking part in this special session, confident — indeed, convinced — that our work will have a positive outcome. Burkina Faso hereby endorses the commitments and recommendations to be made by the participants at this very important session.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Bal, Minister of State of Turkey.

Mr. Bal (Turkey): It was a great honour for my country to host the Habitat II Conference five years ago in Istanbul. It is my honour and privilege today to address this distinguished assembly on behalf of Turkey at this important occasion.

The Habitat Agenda adopted in Istanbul offers us a sound guideline. Thanks to the Agenda, we are witnessing many positive initiatives in the field of housing and greater efforts directed at the sustainable development of human settlements. Indeed, we are happy to see that the spirit of Istanbul is still with us. In that spirit civil society has been recognized as a key actor and the very special role local authorities have to play in achieving the goals set by the Habitat Agenda has been recognized. We are pleased and gratified to see active and increasing participation on the part of our Habitat partners and welcome their important contributions.

People from the Government and municipalities, from the private sector and non-governmental organizations, have come together in nearly 50 provinces of Turkey to develop and put into practice this agenda, in recognition of the key concept of partnership. We are preparing for the next stage of putting the governance concept in place.

It is our hope that, before we reach Istanbul+10, Turkey and many other countries will have undertaken the necessary legislative steps — steps that would establish the legal basis to enable civil society to participate in decisions which affect people's lives and environment.

The Turkish Constitution states that every person has the right to live in a healthy environment. It is incumbent upon the State, therefore, to take the necessary measures to meet the housing needs of its

citizens. There is no discrimination whatsoever among the citizens with regard to ownership and inheritance. Indeed, the existing legal framework saved us from stumbling into legal obstacles in implementing the Habitat Agenda. Moreover, the level of development and capabilities enjoyed by Turkish producers enabled us to remove many bottlenecks faced in the past on the supply side of the equation.

However, besides mentioning these important advantages, I should remind the Assembly of the high rates of urbanization in Turkey. As a result, providing housing, along with the necessary infrastructure and services, has remained a top priority in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. I am sure this is a situation we share with others that have similar high rates of urbanization.

Ensuring more access and providing affordable houses is another priority. Unfortunately, we had to pursue these priorities against the background of major natural disasters. We had to build nearly 42,000 prefabricated shelters and as many permanent ones. We are grateful for the solidarity shown by the international community, Governments and non-governmental organizations alike. This support contributed greatly to our timely relief work. Indeed, I cannot stress enough the importance of international networking, as highlighted in the Habitat Agenda.

There is no doubt that in an increasingly interdependent world, achieving the goal of adequate shelter for all is a noble aim. This also means that we have to provide our cities with better infrastructure and better social services. This is also necessary for attracting investments in this globalizing world. Moreover, we should not lose the richness of local culture in the process.

In building our habitats, we should be sensitive to diversity and to sustaining biological diversity. In this respect, the dimension of regional and international cooperation is important. The similarity of our problems should lead us all to cooperate more. This is another reason why we think that the decision of Habitat to establish a regional office in Istanbul is a very significant step. Turkey will be proud to host this regional office. We are looking forward to the finalization of this project.

Before I conclude, let me highlight the vital importance of strong political will in achieving the goals of the Habitat Agenda. The Government of Turkey is resolved to continue to take part and contribute to this long but rewarding process. After all, these goals represent nothing less than our common aim of achieving a brighter and secure future for mankind.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Momodou Nai Ceesay, Secretary of State for Local Government and Lands of the Gambia.

Mr. Ceesay (Gambia): The Government of the Gambia has always strongly believed that housing is a special consumer good, a major engine for economic growth and a key component of social welfare. The Gambia was among the signatories to the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda during the 1996 second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul. It will be recalled that the main themes of that important summit were: adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlement in an urbanizing world. The Government of the Gambia remains fully committed to the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, and we will endeavour to ensure the successful implementation of our National Plan of Action.

As a result of the prevailing demographic trends and urbanization, the means of meeting the demand for decent housing are proving increasingly elusive. The long-term objective of the housing sector will be to increase the production of decent housing stock on a more regular and sustainable basis. Particular attention will be focussed on the difficult and inadequate access to land for housing, dependence on imported building materials, the manpower and technical limitations of the construction industry, and the need for specialized housing finance institutions, such as housing banks and housing cooperatives.

It is estimated that by the year 2020, two thirds of the world's population will be living in towns and cities. This situation is of great concern to African Governments, especially in the context of the severe shortages in housing and infrastructure, increasing environmental and employment problems and the growing ineffectiveness of administrative systems. It is in this context, therefore, that the Government of the Gambia believes that due attention must be given to the following issues in order to effectively redress the shelter problem.

The first issue is the decentralization of resources and services, including housing facilities, to keep people in their localities.

In this regard, the Government of the Gambia has undertaken an unprecedented programme of decentralizing local government to ensure participatory decision-making at the grass-roots level and is also embarking on a rural electrification programme covering all of our major towns and villages. At present, over 80 per cent of the rural population h..ve access to clean drinking water.

Secondly, with over 75 per cent of the building materials imported, the Gambia can solve its housing problem only by popularizing the use of alternative building materials.

Thirdly, no development effort is feasible without adequate financing. This is why we have decided to establish a Housing Finance Bank in the Gambia, and work in this area is progressing satisfactorily. Meanwhile, private sector initiatives have led to the establishment of housing finance windows in two of our commercial banks.

It must be pointed out, however, that without the necessary climate of peace and stability, all these efforts will bear little fruit. This is why we believe that good governance, which guarantees peace and stability, must be the guiding principle. We have all witnessed the many wars and civil strife across Africa over the years. Such a state of affairs has hampered the continent's ability to achieve the goals of the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration. We are simply destroying more shelter than is being provided in replacement. Such cases abound virtually all over Africa. In order to ensure greater peace, we must promote regional cooperation. In this way, we can facilitate and build trust and greater understanding among ourselves.

The Gambia Government believes in the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing and will continue to provide housing for all its citizens in the form of mass housing projects. There is equal access to land for both males and females. This policy is upheld by both the Government and the Social Security and Housing Finance Corporation (SSHFC) in the allocation of plots of land.

The current government policy on human settlements is to increase open space in settlements. Policies and programmes being pursued at present include the creation of green areas and other areas of environmental and cultural significance. Since the Habitat Conference, an unprecedented number of services and elements of infrastructure, such as hospitals, telecommunications, roads and schools have been made more accessible throughout the country.

The Government accords priority to the development of the private sector as a vehicle for achieving sustainable economic growth. Our investment policy provides a broad-based, attractive incentive structure for potential investors. This includes the removal of obstacles and red tape that hamper the growth of the private sector.

In conclusion, taking a cue from and in consonance with our constitutional provision, "The Gambia incorporated vision 2020", we aim, among other things, to encourage participatory governance and balanced development. The Government of the Gambia will continue to pursue and intensify a comprehensive political and institutional decentralization process. This will contribute to poverty alleviation and diffuse the *different socio-economic tensions that result from rapid* population growth, rural-urban drift, unemployment and regional disparities in economic development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Khussaiby, Secretary-General, Ministry of National Economy of Oman.

Mr. Al-Khussaiby (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for inviting us to participate in the important deliberations of this Conference that aims to achieve the lofty ideal of securing healthy habitat and safe and sustainable human settlements for all. I would also like to thank the President of the General Assembly and wish him every success.

My country's Government realized the importance of human settlements at the time the international community attached importance to the idea. After the holding of the first Habitat Conference in Vancouver in 1976, we adopted the first long-term development strategy for the period 1975-1995. We started establishing housing policies, structural and urban policies for our towns and cities at the beginning of 1996 — that is, at the time of the Istanbul Conference — and also started implementing our Second Development Plan, "Oman 2020". We have concentrated on that strategy, which is the

improvement of the living conditions of the people, not only through policies that aim to achieve economic growth but also through the reduction of development disparities between regions and between income categories.

Through our two strategies, we have tried to secure the following achievements: first, to provide everyone with decent housing, especially those with low incomes; secondly, to adopt comprehensive planning for our land in order to determine the population's habitat needs, while giving the private sector a greater role in this endeavour; and thirdly, to adopt the necessary criteria in town planning, especially while planning for new areas of human settlements and for expanding existing ones. In the framework of all these plans, we have tried to strike the necessary balance.

Pursuant to the Istanbul Declaration — that is, in order to ensure the participation of all social groups, for them to enjoy shelter and to adopt a participatory approach — we have, in implementing the Habitat Agenda, endorsed the principle of participation of civil society through the establishment of local committees and local authorities. These policies and measures adopted by my country over the last 25 years have been successful, as can be seen from the various statistics submitted in our country report to the special session.

My Government believes that just human settlements simply mean giving affordable shelter to all, without discrimination and with all the necessary requirements. This is precisely why, at all levels and with the participation of universities and civil society institutions, we have highlighted the fact that all the ideas enshrined in the Istanbul Declaration will be implemented through the various legislative and socio-economic policies.

Habitat is an international issue, as are human settlements. This is why we believe that the world is responsible for these two issues. Therefore, we have to adopt an international approach to solve the problems facing us and to improve the social, environmental and economic conditions prevailing in human settlements. For this reason, we would like to express our concern as to what is happening in the Palestinian-occupied territories with reference to the illegal Israeli settlements, because the continued settlement policy there creates further conflict, and this is a very negative development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Robert T. Molloy, Minister of Housing and Urban Renewal, Department of the Environment and Local Government of Ireland.

Mr. Molloy (Ireland): The problems of urbanization are common to all participating countries, and the Habitat Agenda is of crucial importance to all of us in our national land use, environmental and housing policies.

The Habitat process, through the mechanism of national reports, affords and encourages a sharing of ideas, experiences and innovative and varied approaches to these issues. The five years since Istanbul have been remarkable for my own country, as this period has coincided with the most sustained and intense period of economic growth that Ireland has experienced for many decades. Irish cities, and Dublin in particular, have been the engine rooms of this economic success. However, this has brought new pressures. Our National Habitat Report reflects the sheer pace, scale and fundamental nature of the responses that have been required to meet these new challenges.

A major focus of the Habitat Agenda is the need for cooperation between all partners, be they national or local government, community and voluntary groups, or employers and trade unions. Our recent experience has demonstrated that such partnership is vital to building the consensus required to achieve social, economic and sustainable growth.

This partnership approach is embodied in a national agreement: the Programme for Partnership and Fairness. Its key aims are to underpin Ireland's competitiveness and develop economic prosperity on a sustainable basis, while enhancing the quality of life in the context of a fairer and more inclusive society. For example, the Irish Government has established a National Housing Forum, where all the social partners can make a direct contribution to housing policy formulation.

There is also an emphasis on the development of local governance initiatives, through, for example, Local Agenda 21, aimed at maximizing the involvement and participation of local communities in the democratic process. This includes the identification of targeted interventions in areas where cumulative disadvantage is acute and also the encouragement of

economic and social development in rural communities.

We have embarked on a major programme of local government reform which endeavours to encourage openness and transparency at both the political and administrative levels and involves community and local groups. New County Development Boards have been established to formulate strategies for a more integrated approach to local government and local development, and to ensure a more coherent service delivery system at the local level.

The Government is committed to achieving more balanced development throughout the whole country. We are preparing a National Spatial Strategy, with the objective of ensuring that the regions have a greater share of economic activity in the years ahead. At the same time, it will deal with the problems of congestion arising from the growth of the greater Dublin area. Thus the strategy, which will take a long-term perspective — over a 20-year period — should contribute to the improvement of the quality of life for communities throughout the country.

The development of a comprehensive National Anti-Poverty Strategy framework has been one of the most important areas in which the social partnership approach has facilitated the enhancement of equality through the elimination of poverty. This 10-year strategy recognizes poverty eradication as a vitally important issue in the public policy context.

Each participating country must devise policies and mechanisms to deliver on the broad principles that are being discussed here. The provision of adequate shelter for all is a central component of Irish social policy and will continue to be at the heart of how we deliver on the principles enunciated at Istanbul and which are being reaffirmed in the draft Declaration. The Irish Government has launched an integrated strategy to comprehensively tackle homelessness. This recognizes that homelessness is increasingly a symptom of social problems that cannot be addressed solely in a housing context. A comprehensive approach involving both shelter and support to enable homeless persons to reintegrate into society is required.

We have also established a new statutory framework to meet the accommodation needs of travellers. Local authorities are obliged to draw up, adopt and implement a five-year programme to meet the accommodation needs of travellers in their areas. This includes addressing their specific needs through, for example, the provision of halting sites.

The issue of overseas development aid has engendered significant interest and debate here at this special session, and we fully recognize its importance. At last year's Millennium Summit, Ireland gave a solemn undertaking that we would reach the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance by the year 2007. Ireland is on target to meet our commitment, which will see our national development assistance programme increase fourfold by 2007. Indeed, by 2003, Ireland will increase spending on official development assistance by 102 per cent over the level in the year 2000, to reach $469 million, the largest ever increase in our national official development assistance budget. This rate of expansion is without precedent for any donor.

I have tried to touch on some of the key areas which are of relevance to my Government in delivering on the key Habitat objectives. This process has provided an invaluable opportunity to forge a new vision for the years ahead.

While the problems are formidable and overcoming them will test our resolve and ingenuity to the full, we have seen that, when faced with what had seemed insurmountable problems, communities, municipalities and governments have risen to the challenge. I am convinced, therefore, that we will succeed in giving effect to the principles outlined in the draft Declaration and ensure a better future for all.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Herivelona Ramanantsoa, Minister of National and Regional Development, Environment and Town Planning of Madagascar.

Mr. Ramanantsoa (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): It is a signal honour for me to take the floor today at this special session of the General Assembly devoted to the question of human settlements. As the representative of Mr. Didier Ratsiraka, President of the Republic of Madagascar, it is my duty to transmit to Secretary-General Kofi Annan his deep regret at not having been able to attend this special session, due to time constraints. Indeed, our country is in the midst of putting in place the final elements of our decentralized structure: the autonomous provinces.

However, by sending a large delegation that includes many authorities who are working in the field in the human settlements sector, our Government wishes to make clear our deep interest in the objectives set for this world summit on human settlements.

In this respect, Madagascar would like solemnly to pay warm tribute to the initiators of this special session. We would like to convey to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the organizing team our sincere gratitude and our deepest appreciation.

Following the 1996 Istanbul Conference, Madagascar, like other countries, launched a national human settlements policy geared, in its initial phase, to finding ways and means of resolving the immediate problem: insufficient housing units. At that time, our national stock of residential buildings showed a deficit of several hundred thousand housing units.

We thus started to implement our policy by gathering together all of those involved in human settlements — public and private real estate promoters, both national and foreign; banks and insurance companies; manufacturers of local building materials; artisans and so on — and focusing them on the goal of constructing 35,000 housing units within five years. In addition, in order to promote do-it-yourself building, the Government is making housing more available to low-income households by offering them the possibility of acquiring a 200-square-metre plot of land for a very low price under an innovative programme called "one household, one plot of land".

At the same time we have been thinking about the future of our nation's human settlement problems, relying on fresh demographic data that shows a population growth rate in towns of 5 per cent, which is much higher than the national average of 2.8 per cent. At this rate, in the next 15 years, 35 per cent of the population of Madagascar will live in towns and cities. Sixty rural communes in the first category, the former sub-prefectoral centres, now undergoing urbanization, will have become secondary towns.

Urbanization is relentless. This movement is the result of a transition to a trading and industrial economy, of rural migration and of natural population growth. In fact, urban development can no longer be seen separately from rural development. The evolution of these two goes hand in hand and follows an interdependent logic. Towns and countryside are now dependent upon one another and independent of the ups and downs of the foreign market. The towns are becoming reception centres and service centres for the rural population, as well as centres for grouping, processing and marketing regional produce.

Thus, the analysis of the roles of towns in the socio-economic development of the country and land structuring, as well as the study of poverty in urban areas, has led us to formulate an urban programme to prevent poverty. Worked out through a participatory process among many partners and through consultations in the field, the approach to this programme involves project coordinators, associations, urban and rural town halls of the first category, ministries and funding sources. This process has identified four strategic goals: urban governance, conditions of life and human settlements, economic development at local and regional levels, as well as urban social integration. These four goals are the main lines of the action plan that will be implemented by 103 urban areas in the national urban system, ranging from small centres undergoing organization, secondary towns, regional capitals and the national capital.

There will be a strengthening of the capacity to manage and plan the development of partnerships with local authorities in the state. As far as the living environment and housing settlements are concerned, there will be an attempt to improve the conditions for the poor and make it possible for them to acquire land, housing and basic services. The point here is to include neglected districts and to raise the level of infrastructure, as well as to develop financing mechanisms, while also looking ahead to a gradual extension of cities.

With regard to the plan for local and regional economic development, the point here is to develop the capacities of firms, stimulate trade between regions and towns and to facilitate the emergence of regional economic poles.

With regard to urban social integration, there will be greater socio-economic inclusiveness for the poor and an attempt to promote their sense of citizenship and their participation in the benefits of growth, as well as to guarantee the protection of persons and property.

In implementation of this programme, needs and priorities have been expressed by type of town or city by their mayors during field consultations. To fine-tune these priorities, consolidate the process of partnership and enhance its sustainability, it is proposed that this

structure should involve both local authorities and the State, and lead eventually to the establishment of a State-town contract.

Distinguished delegates, the holding of this special session has come at the right moment for our country in that the challenges connected with urban development in our national strategy to reduce poverty call for the essential support of our development partners if they are to be realized and fruitful.

To conclude, we would like to repeat our complete commitment to the new directions advocated by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements under the leadership of Madame Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, centred around two major themes: security of residential occupation and good urban governance.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Mr. I. M. C. Chombo, Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chombo (Zimbabwe): Like any developing country, Zimbabwe is faced with problems, but our determination to implement the Habitat Agenda is unquestionable and some significant strides have been made in this endeavour.

We see the team spirit created by the establishment of our National Habitat Committee as a major strategy to the reduction of the housing waiting lists that exist in every urban centre of Zimbabwe and to assist in the provision of shelter in the rural areas as well. The key responsibilities of our Habitat Committee are to facilitate, coordinate and promote activities of all stakeholders who want to participate in the provision of shelter.

Some progress has been made in the provision of shelter for the citizens of Zimbabwe, even though our national housing backlog still exceeds one million. My Government is moving away from the role of being the direct provider of housing to a facilitating role. We are encouraging and facilitating the provision of housing through a number of approaches that involve the participation of local authorities, the private sector, donors and the beneficiaries themselves, in partnerships that enable the pooling together of resources and skills. These approaches have resulted in more than 100,000 new houses being constructed since the Istanbul Conference in 1996.

The Committee has produced the National Housing Policy, which has been approved by Government and is now our framework for further advancement in ensuring that every citizen in Zimbabwe has a decent place to call home. This policy document is a product of wide consultations and as such is enjoying national ownership and support that goes beyond Government circles.

In line with our facilitation role, our Government has embarked on a process of decentralization, particularly of centrally controlled urban land and infrastructure. While carrying out the process of decentralization, we are duty-bound to ensure that the local authorities are capable of handling the new powers and responsibilities entrusted to them. We are therefore undertaking a capacity-building exercise in our councils, and I am happy to announce that some pleasing results are being achieved.

Zimbabwe is constantly looking for innovations in building technology and regulatory systems. We are also encouraging local authorities to investigate, experiment with and test alternate building materials and methods of service provision. This has required a paradigm shift but we are seeing some favourable results, although some failures have also been experienced.

We in Zimbabwe are not only concerned about urban housing, because the majority of our people live in rural areas. My Government has embarked on a major land reform programme that has drawn a great deal of international attention.

The land reform programme is not just about the redistribution of land. It includes the provision of basic infrastructure, shelter and inputs to enable the farmers to thrive and to improve their lifestyles. Owing to the magnitude of the land-reform programme, we are going to experience a major change in the settlement patterns in our country. The construction of 200,000 new homes for people who have for years been deprived of access to agricultural land and who have suffered from the resulting poverty is a major challenge. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon the progressive international community to join us in our efforts to address imbalances and facilitate a decent lifestyle for all our people.

As I have already stated, we are decentralizing power to local authorities and have made it easier for them to provide basic infrastructure. We envisage the

development of small urban centres rather than the urban sprawl associated with large cities. My Government has already set up a system of tax benefits for investors in these small centres.

Members will agree with me that in order for the Habitat Agenda goals to be achieved, the requisite financing should be made available. As set out in paragraph 26 of the draft Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium,

> "domestic resource mobilization as well as sound national policies are crucial for financing shelter and human settlements". (*A/S-25/2, para. 26*)

Further, the Habitat Agenda requires Governments to strengthen existing financial mechanisms and to develop innovative approaches for the financing of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

In this area, my Government, together with the private sector, is spearheading the establishment of the secondary mortgage market as a means of mobilizing domestic financing. New legislation is being actively considered to bring new players, such as pension funds, insurance firms and banks, into the area of shelter development. The capacity-building programme being run by my Government is encouraging local authorities to participate in capital markets. Credit-rating agencies have now been set up to rate those local authorities that want to borrow on the open market.

Despite those efforts, we will always have a shortfall of resources. At the eighteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements, I pointed out that Africa has some of the world's poorest countries. Paragraph 50 of the Habitat Agenda calls upon developed countries to strive

> "to fulfil the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of ... gross national product ... for official development assistance". (*A/CONF.165/14, annex II*)

In line with that provision, I implore the first world to appreciate our position and to support the World Bank's Special Programme for Africa by funding initiatives by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and by providing financial support for United Nations agencies dealing with the problems of Africa.

I want to assure participants that we will not cease to strive to ensure that the right to shelter enshrined in the Declaration is a reality in Zimbabwe. It is constantly said that the world is a global village; we certainly want our part of the village to be made up of decent, environmentally friendly and affordable houses which are owned by their occupants, and not the shacks that are so often associated with the third world.

I appeal to all participants to think about future generations. They will be able to give us credit and honour only if we leave behind a decent living environment. This session should give us a blueprint of hope and should create a sense of urgency. I wish all of us fruitful deliberations as we endeavour to set a firm foundation for the future.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Francis Babu, Minister of State for Works, Housing and Communications of Uganda.

Mr. Babu (Uganda): I have the honour and privilege to address the Assembly at this special session on behalf of the Uganda Government. Uganda participated fully in the regional meeting which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in November 2000, and my Government subscribes to the Addis Ababa Declaration on Human Settlements in the New Millennium. In that Declaration, African Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the Habitat Agenda endorsed in Istanbul 1996 in the areas of adequate shelter for all, sustainable human settlements, enablement, all-inclusive participation and gender equality and mainstreaming, among other areas. Uganda looks forward to seeing the major elements of the Addis Ababa Declaration incorporated in the final declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, as they offer useful and proactive guidelines in our resolve to better our human settlements.

Like any other developing State Member of the United Nations, Uganda has faced a number of challenges and constraints in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. These include: poverty and unemployment, which negatively affect and incapacitate most households in their efforts to improve their housing conditions and quality of life; and institutional weakness caused by inadequate capacity at all levels among stakeholders. Despite all those constraints and challenges, we have endeavoured to implement the Habitat Agenda. In that connection, Uganda urges other Member States to ensure that poverty eradication and debt relief form the core of the

declaration. All other aspects of the Declaration revolve around these two.

A hungry man is an angry man. Democracy, good governance, shelter for all, and all the paraphernalia of family values will not be realized if people are hungry. We are all aware that sustainable development is another key element of the Habitat Agenda. The Government of Uganda attaches the highest priority to poverty eradication. We have adopted a comprehensive poverty eradication action plan and have established a poverty action fund, along with many other programmes to empower people and to improve household income for all.

There is a dire need for our development partners to enhance support for poverty eradication by contributing the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product. Currently, my country's entire public investment plan is tailored to eradicate poverty. This has so far resulted in a relative reduction of poverty levels. That reduction has been possible due mainly to macroeconomic stability and adherence to economic reforms undertaken by the Government since 1986. As a result, Uganda has qualified for and has accessed debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative.

Because of its experience, Uganda fully advocates full debt relief for developing countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. Conditionalities on debt relief should be relaxed.

Uganda appreciates the overriding centrality of land and land tenure for human settlements and for development in general. As Charles Abrams said long ago, "the surer the land tenure the deeper the building". I am proud to say that Uganda's Constitution has vested ownership of land in the hands of the citizens of Uganda. It recognizes all the different tenure systems under which land is held, including customary land tenure and freehold tenure. In addition, the new Land Act of 1998 grants security of tenure to former squatters on land they have occupied for 12 years or more.

With regard to governance, Uganda has fully embraced decentralization and democratic governance. The Local Government Act of 1997 provides a legal framework for the operationalization of decentralized governance. The Government has fully decentralized executive and legislative powers, as well as powers to make fiscal decisions. It is in the process of gradually devolving the development budget.

Governance is critical to sustainable human settlements development. Within the framework of the policy for governance based on decentralization and enabling policy on housing, community-based organizations have been empowered to plan and implement, on a self-help basis, shelter and human settlements development programmes.

On management of the environment, the National Environment Management Authority has been set up and its statute empowers it to oversee all matters of environmental concern in Uganda. The concept of public-private partnerships for urban environment is being introduced in Uganda with the help of the United Nations Development Programme and is aimed at improving basic services and infrastructure. Uganda commends this public-private initiative and there is commitment to implementing it as a measure towards improving the living environment in the country.

We trust and believe that this time our wishes and commitments in the whole process of Istanbul+5 will be fulfilled and that all stakeholders will play their part in ensuring that we forge ahead with the proposed future initiatives. Before I finish, let me be like Oliver Twist and ask our development partners for more so that we can achieve the Habitat Agenda.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing and Agriculture of Bahrain.

Sheikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to speak in my capacity as the head of the Bahrain delegation to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

It is my pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session and I wish you success in this important undertaking. It is also my privilege to convey to you the greetings of the leadership of modern Bahrain.

Bahrain is witnessing a political democratic development wherein human rights, freedom of expression and parliamentary participation are being further strengthened. This movement towards

democratic reforms has been initiated by the Emir of Bahrain, His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa. The people of Bahrain have, with an overwhelming majority, voted in favour of the National Charter.

The State of Bahrain has over the past five years participated effectively at the national and regional levels in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This is clearly reflected in the Bahrain country report. Realizing the importance of and need for regional cooperation, especially within the Arab world, Bahrain hosted the Arab regional meeting in preparation of Istanbul+5, one important output of which is the Manama Declaration.

The Manama Declaration clearly reflects a unified vision of the participating Arab States with regard to the course to follow towards sustainable human settlements development within the Arab region. In the Declaration, a great number of important special references are made, including to the close and integral relationship between sustainable development and quality of life. We trust that the content of the Manama Declaration will be reflected in the Istanbul+5 declaration.

Bahrain and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) have a long history of close cooperation, direct and indirect. This close cooperation has resulted in a number of joint programmes, including the establishment of the Bahrain Urban Indicator Programme and the Bahrain National Urban Observatory. The development of a sustainable urban development strategy has been planned for the near future.

Mr. Shihab (Maldives), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We wish on this occasion to compliment the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) for the excellent work it is undertaking at the global, regional and national levels, especially in Bahrain, and to express our appreciation for the choice of Bahrain as one of the States where the Global Campaign for Good Urban Governance will be launched. We will continue to support the Centre and its programmes.

As a State Member of the United Nations and its agencies, and recently as member of the Commission on Human Rights and the economic and social development Committee, Bahrain would like to reiterate the high importance it attaches to actively participating in conferences, sessions and meetings organized by international organizations in a wide variety of different fields, including in the area of human settlements. In this connection, Bahrain took part at the global level in the Vancouver Conference in 1976 and in the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996.

At the regional and global levels, Bahrain has participated in World Habitat Day and in the Arab Housing Day that was celebrated by Arab housing ministers to affirm that housing is tantamount to stability and a safe environment.

At the national level, the State of Bahrain has taken progressive steps in the area of human settlements, in particular since the creation of the Ministry of Housing and Agriculture in 1975. The programmes and activities of Bahrain are guided by the principle of providing adequate housing for every family that does not own or cannot afford to build such housing. This principle has been embedded in the Constitution of Bahrain, which affirms that the State shall provide housing for those with limited income.

On this basis, since 1975 the Ministry of Housing and Agriculture has very successfully undertaken multiple housing programmes and projects. As a result, approximately 62 per cent of the population are at present supported by these programmes. The Government of Bahrain has provided needy families in difficult circumstances with housing and other social services, in addition to assistance given through the Emiri endowment for social care. These programmes and facilities, under the leadership of the Emir of Bahrain, are in line with the recommendations and resolutions of the United Nations, in particular those of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

We look forward to the success of this session in laying the foundations for providing each family and each individual with a life of dignity in a society whose present and future well-being is secure.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdol Alizadeh, Minister of Housing and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Abdol Alizadeh (Islamic Republic of Iran) (*spoke in Persian; English interpretation furnished by*

the delegation): The five-year review of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held in Istanbul should provide us with a unique opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, evaluate our accomplishments and the obstacles encountered along the way, identify current and emerging challenges and seek further initiatives and actions to meet them. The only rationale for this review session is to be able to build upon the past and move ahead.

First of all, I take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/Habitat) for all their good work, including the preparation of very useful guidelines for country reporting.

As for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, over the past five years we have initiated a number of actions and measures aimed at making the process sustainable. Let me just draw attention to some of the lessons learned in the process.

First, as underlined at the regional preparatory high-level meeting, access to land alone does not suffice for shelter provision. Following 20 years of experience, a shift at the level of national policy from the mere provision of land to the provision of housing has been effected. Secondly, the shift in the shelter provision policy has been accompanied by a more pronounced emphasis on private sector activity and contribution, whose positive impact at the national level is quite discernible.

Thirdly, formulation and implementation of the "rent-to-own" plan for young couples and female-headed households has proved to be a useful and popular policy with a bright future; fourthly, increasing access to credit for youth and the poor by supporting specialized non-profit, non-governmental funds and credit institutions; fifthly, enhancing the role of community-based organizations as effective enabling institutions for the provision of housing; sixthly, creating an integrated and coordinated system of urban and rural management in order to control and guide the process of urban development and the activities of the agencies responsible for the provision of infrastructural services and facilities; and finally, emphasis on the elimination of monopolies, promotion of popular participation and civil society and activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the enhancement of private sector investment and the promotion of the role of local Islamic councils.

On the promotion of local governance, I should add that in early 1999 free democratic elections were held across the country for local, town and village councils, thus taking a major step towards the effective decentralization of decision-making, partnership and participation in implementation of policies.

Let me now just draw attention, very briefly, to some of the major current and recurrent problems facing the international community. First of all, I should say that I agree with you, Mr. President, that we are at the beginning of the urban millennium. But, let us not forget the almost totally neglected rural millennium, particularly in the developing world.

Worse than the rural plight is the precarious situation of refugees, an unfortunate persisting phenomenon of global dimensions and one also requiring an urgent global collective response. The plight of refugees and the homeless can hardly find a more telling example than that of the oppressed Palestinian people. We believe this important international gathering on human settlements must, by its very rationale, take a very strong position in denouncing the Israeli policy of systematic destruction of Palestinian homes and simultaneous expansion of settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.

Speaking here as the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I can only end on a positive note and state that the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations, thanks to President Khatemi, provides the most appropriate framework and conduit for the promotion of a higher level of universal understanding and effective international cooperation. It is only through cooperation, based on dialogue, at all levels that the international community stands the chance of achieving the objectives of the Habitat Agenda and the present review Conference.

I thank you very much, Mr. President, and wish you and the Bureau every success in leading the Conference to an outcome rising to the challenge of the moment and the situation.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Tan Van, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Construction of Viet Nam.

Mr. Nguyen Tan Van (Viet Nam) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, on behalf of the delegation of the

Government of Viet Nam, to extend greetings to all representatives at this special session of the General Assembly on human settlements.

Housing has been recognized as a basic human right of the individual and represents a primary concern in the daily life of all from every strata of life. Viet Nam is a nation of limited land and is densely populated, with a developing economy and harsh climatic conditions. All those factors force the Vietnamese to save to improve their shelters, thereby contributing to the increase of the housing stock.

Taking into consideration the role and the importance of human settlements within the country's economic and social development process, the Government has clearly focused efforts and attention on resolving housing problems, especially by building settlements in urban areas, as expected, in order to be able to meet housing demands in the face of the rapid urbanization in recent years.

Since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul, great and positive changes have been achieved in human settlements development in Viet Nam. The Government of Viet Nam is applying a policy of abolishing the housing subsidies system and is pointing out all housing possibilities to the population, especially in urban areas.

The State has focused special attention on a series of policies, aimed inter alia at the rehabilitation of the machinery for the housing investment policy for development, the promotion of skilled labour to participate in settlement-building, the privatization of State settlements, the authorization of priority investment for building settlements in urban areas, the facilitation of land acquisition for settlements and others. These policies have brought about positive changes in Viet Nam's housing sector.

During the past five years nearly 39 million square metres of new housing were built; 75 per cent of those dwellings were built with the private capital of the population. The average living space per capita reached 8 square metres in 2000. The Government pays special attention to building shelters in areas affected by floods and cyclones and to improving the environment along canals in urban areas and industrial parks.

The Government is encouraging the construction of apartment buildings in cities to satisfy the requirements of middle- and low-income residents. We attach great importance to such construction, which is taking place in accordance with land-use requirements and the demands of population growth.

However, the fact that residential units are in short supply and 10 million square metres of housing are in poor condition continues to be a major challenge in Viet Nam. This is a particular problem for low-income housing in the big cities and in rural areas where there are often floods and cyclones.

Many housing units in urban areas have been built by individuals themselves. The infrastructure of much of this housing is inadequate, and there are no controls for the preservation of the environment and its natural beauty. In addition to increasing housing stock, therefore, the Government of Viet Nam and the urban authorities will be taking priority measures to resolve the problems associated with unplanned and uncontrolled housing construction.

Housing policy is closely linked to other social policies, such as eliminating hunger, reducing poverty and creating employment, all of which are designed to promote social equality. Taken together, housing construction and environmental reform will stimulate healthy growth in the housing market and contribute to the development of the national economy.

Poor and low-income residents need to be accorded priority assistance in the area of housing. In order to stimulate all aspects of the economy, including foreign investment in the housing development sector, the Government will be developing a policy to make conditions more favourable for investment in housing construction and to accord it greater priority.

Over the next five years, the urban population will require an additional 60 million square metres of housing, which will help to increase it to an average of 10 to 12 square metres per person. Viet Nam has begun to implement a economic and social and development strategy for the period 2001-2010, and a five-year plan for the period 2001-2005. We are open to relations with all countries and international organizations on the basis of equality in cooperation and development.

In the area of housing development, the Vietnamese Government is committed to creating favourable conditions for foreign investment in Viet Nam. I should like to take this opportunity to express our hope that we will soon receive the valuable

assistance offered by Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals throughout the world in support of the economic and social development of Viet Nam in general and of its housing development in particular.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ileana Tureanu, State Secretary, Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and Housing of Romania.

Mrs. Tureanu (Romania): In assessing progress towards the fulfilment of the Habitat Agenda commitments and strategies, the Government of Romania wishes to present to the special session of the General Assembly the status of the implementation of its national programmes and actions.

The Istanbul Declaration underlined the importance of placing housing development issues in a sustainable perspective. Through the concurrent implementation of various policy measures, therefore, the Government of Romania is committed to supporting the sustainable development of human settlements and to increasing the ability of all stakeholders to mobilize resources towards resolving housing issues.

The major policies and actions of the Government are focused in two main areas: continuous legislative activity in support of the sustainable development of human settlements; and enhancing the role of the Government as facilitator and catalysing factor in the development of the housing sector.

The medium-term strategy of the Government of Romania reflects the close links that have to be established between the sustainable development of human settlements and an accelerated reform process aimed at achieving a well-functioning market economy. The overall framework of such an approach is provided by Romania's National Programme for Spatial Development. The specific programmes and policies spelled out in the national plan concentrate on the major issues that require government measures to be taken in order to achieve the overall goals of socio-economic reform and the sustainable development of human settlements. They relate to the main transport infrastructure, water management, areas of cultural and natural heritage, the network of human settlements and the prevention of natural disasters.

The documents of the national plan have been adopted by the Parliament of Romania as framework laws, and they represent guidelines for action for all relevant actors at the central and local levels, orienting both government programmes and private investment in the various fields. The network of human settlements is of special concern for the Government of Romania. As important economic and social changes are being brought about through reform, the restructuring and remodelling of urban and rural settlements is crucial for improving the living conditions of their inhabitants.

A comprehensive analysis of human settlements, based on 30 indicators, revealed the challenges that require priority attention. These include the need, first, to increase the polycentric character of the network of cities by reducing the disparities between the capital city, Bucharest, on the one hand, and other towns and municipalities on the other; secondly, to enhance the role of small- and medium-sized towns in the surrounding area, with a view to providing higher-quality social and community services throughout the territory; and thirdly, to arrest the further decline of living conditions in rural areas and set a positive course for economic and social development, through better infrastructure and public services.

A special section of the national plan is dedicated to the prevention of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and landslides. It is stipulated by law that local government, together with specialized institutions, must identify and map risk-prone areas, and must take special planning and technical measures to protect settlements and families from the consequences of natural disasters.

Housing ranks high on the agenda of the Government programme for the next four years. After a decade of economic and social reform, it is widely recognized that housing is an important sector of the economy and makes a substantial contribution to gross capital formation. It is also a key factor in the development of human settlements and in ensuring social stability and the well-being of individuals and families.

The basic attitude guiding government action is its commitment to achieving a competitive market economy. This commitment is reflected in the main principles of Romanian housing policy. These are the better definition of the role of the State in facilitating the development of market mechanisms and in ensuring

the functioning of an efficient housing market; facilitating access to the market for all the actors involved in the development of the housing sector; and providing a safety net for the neediest. The National Strategy for Housing for the next four years, developed by the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Housing, aims at mitigating the burden imposed by the relationship of the market price of housing to the average family income; facilitating access to the market for specific categories, especially young individuals and families; providing incentives for private investment in housing; and enhancing the role of the National Housing Agency as a developer and a loan-funding institution.

We note with satisfaction that our priorities and concerns are well reflected and included in the declaration that will be adopted by this session. Romania reaffirms its commitment to continue implementing the provisions of the Habitat Agenda and to take part in the international cooperation in this very dynamic field, thus further benefiting from support and assistance for carrying out its national programmes.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergey Kruglik, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Russian Federation for Construction, Housing and Municipal Economy.

Mr. Kruglik (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Russian Federation would like to emphasize the importance of this special session of the General Assembly as an event symbolic of international cooperation in the sphere of sustainable development of urban and rural human settlements. We see the main goal of this forum as being an objective appraisal of the progress achieved in implementing the decisions of the Istanbul Conference on human settlements and the elaboration of agreed upon approaches for further international efforts to ensure sustainable development of human settlements.

While acknowledging the successes achieved by a number of countries in this field, we cannot ignore the persisting and in some cases intensifying problems. The accelerating process of globalization has considerable potential for accelerating economic and social development; it also may increase the danger of the marginalization and further exclusion of those countries that cannot integrate themselves into it. As the Millennium Declaration states, our central challenge is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all peoples and States. Our work today should make a profound contribution to the attainment of this noble goal.

In its human settlements policy the Government of the Russian Federation guides itself by the provisions of the Habitat Agenda adopted in Istanbul as a long-term plan. The two basic priorities of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development are being put into practice.

In Russia, the right of citizens to housing is guaranteed by the Constitution. According to fundamental laws, the poor and several other categories of citizens are provided with housing either free or at affordable prices. The right of private property in Russia is protected by the law. Over the last few years a series of laws and decisions of the Government were passed to ensure social and legal protection of the ownership of housing of citizens, including minor members of the family. The reforms in the housing sector undertaken in the 1990s are an integral part of Russian Federation economic reform. The existing legislative framework regulating housing and municipal sectors is being improved. As a result of the reforms, by the end of 1999, about 60 per cent of the housing stock in Russian was privatized. Most people of the country became owners of their homes, and a housing market began to be created.

The Government is taking all possible measures to ensure the interests of the most vulnerable, socially unprotected and poorest populations. A programme of focused social assistance is being implemented in the form of subsidies for the payment of housing and utility costs. Today about 73 per cent of the population of Russia live in cities, and the improvement of urban governance and development is one of the major priorities. After the Istanbul Conference, we started to actively implement the international system of urban and housing indicators for monitoring urban development. To this end, urban monitoring stations are being established.

Among the most important objectives in the area of sustainable human settlement development is ensuring the sustainability of urban infrastructure systems, including public transit systems. In addition, serious attention is being paid to the improvement of the functioning of local self-government bodies to strengthen the social infrastructure of human

settlements — that is, education, health care, social protection and other services.

Russia is going through a difficult period of large-scale market reforms, which creates additional problems for the achievement of the objectives set in the Habitat Agenda. In this situation, international cooperation is of special significance, offering us an important source of support for our efforts. In this context, we would like to emphasize the fruitfulness and usefulness of our cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, which is the main organization of the United Nations system in this field. The projects implemented in Russia with the assistance from the Centre for Human Settlements have enhanced the effectiveness of our efforts in such fields as improvement of urban governance, management of the housing stock, and municipal infrastructure, among others.

We believe that the work of the Centre for Human Settlements and other organizations of the United Nations system in the interests of the countries with economies in transition should be continued and developed. We consider that the priorities of such work should include further improvement of housing legislation, establishing legal bases for ensuring popular participation in the organization of local self-government, the reform of the management of the housing stock and the municipal economic infrastructure, the organization of national and local monitoring stations, the adaptation of forward-looking international experience to the conditions of countries undergoing market reforms, and the development of innovative models for mobilizing additional resources, including private sector resources, for sustainable human settlements programmes.

In conclusion, let me express confidence that this special session will enable us to achieve real progress towards the achievement of the goals of the Habitat Agenda in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tomaž Kancler, State Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia.

Mr. Kancler (Slovenia): Let me start by expressing, on behalf of the Government of Slovenia, great appreciation for the initiative and enormous work done by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and by the regional centres in promoting and encouraging a worldwide effort to improve the quality of life in human settlements. We believe that these efforts will contribute to forming a more solid basis for sustainable development and mutual cooperation, with the common goal of a better quality of life. This work is furthermore setting up a suitable framework that is helping to define spatial-development policy measures to accomplish these goals, taking into consideration the principles of democracy and human rights. Slovenia welcomes and supports these efforts with great enthusiasm and high expectations.

Slovenia has already aligned itself with the statement delivered yesterday by Minister for Housing of Sweden on behalf of the European Union, and we subscribe to it in full. I would like to take this opportunity to also briefly present some of the most important achievements in the process of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in Slovenia, as well as the priority goals for further actions to achieve sustainable development.

In the five years since Habitat II, Slovenia has made significant steps in the design of a new spatial-planning system, particularly in searching for administrative solutions so as to adapt the legal system of the country, including adapting to a market economy, a democratic system and the establishment of local government. At present, significant efforts are under way towards improving spatial-planning legislation with an emphasis on land policy, and towards preparing the new spatial plan of Slovenia, which is setting an overall strategy for spatial development. Slovenia incorporated the Habitat Agenda recommendations in the process of the preparation of its spatial plan, which — along with the National Environmental Protection Programme and Economic Development Strategy — is one of the main strategic documents oriented towards sustainable development. The main principles of the concept, in terms of a better and sustainable quality of life, are, among others, the rational use of land, protection of the natural and cultural heritage, social cohesion and, of course, economic development.

The characteristics of our country also give rise to specific problems that we encounter in the development process. Slovenia is a Central European country of about 20,000 square kilometres, with a population of roughly 1.9 million people living in slightly less than 6,000 settlements. It is marked by an

extremely varied landscape and a large number of small urban settlements. These characteristics are reflected in the uneven economic structure, polycentric development, dispersed settlement structure and distribution of population.

Within the context of the spatial development strategy, we stress the priorities of achieving a balanced urban structure and urban network; the effective management of urban growth; balancing the housing market; and improving the land and real estate policy.

First of all, countries with small cities have a specific position within the larger spatial context. We have to deal with the development of strategies that define the role of small cities within large-city networks. As easy as it is to achieve balanced structures within the small-city networks, it is a greater challenge to find their place, in terms of cooperation and competitiveness, in relation to larger European cities. Special attention also needs to be focused on managing the outward expansion of towns and cities. This creates new urban structures — for example, suburban areas — that are also the consequence of land and real estate policies that remain unsettled.

Secondly, it is also very important for Slovenia to establish balanced land and real estate markets, especially to ensure the better provision of housing. Processes like privatization and denationalization are slowing down the development of these markets, supported by good land and real estate policy. Therefore, we have to dedicate ourselves to making a special effort to solve these complex problems. One of our most important needs is to modernize the land administration and information system in order to ensure land availability for development.

Slovenia has already set out an outline for the implementation strategy of the Habitat Agenda — the National Programme for the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda — in the Slovenian national report on Habitat II. We also set a number of priority objectives.

My country is implementing sustainable developmental goals as a priority in all of its new strategic documents and has undertaken the implementation of the Habitat Agenda commitments as a continuous process.

We will also continue to actively support sustainable and balanced spatial development by presiding over the European Conference of Ministers Responsible for Regional Planning until 2003, and we will continue to emphasize the quality of human settlement development. In the spirit of these endeavours, activities are going to be organized to promote an integrated approach to spatial development planning, to promote the implementation of the guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent, and to prepare proposals for common projects which will promote international and interregional cooperation in sustainable spatial development efforts.

I am confident that this continuing spirit of cooperation, along with a clear political commitment and awareness of the common goals of all nations, as agreed upon in the Habitat Agenda, will allow us to achieve better solutions to the complex problems we all face, as well as to achieve sustainable development and, most of all, a better quality of life. Slovenia is prepared to continue to work towards the Habitat Agenda commitments, and in this spirit it fully supports the adoption of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency U Tint Swe, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Construction of Myanmar.

U Tint Swe (Myanmar): It is an honour and a privilege for me to address this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

The convening of this special session for the overall review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda offers us a unique opportunity to review our country's efforts in human settlement development and to set new priorities for sustainable development.

Our participation in all the substantive sessions of the preparatory committee for the Istanbul+5 process and the regional preparatory meeting in China have increased our awareness and understanding so that we can tackle the problems of urbanization in this new millennium.

Against the background of the Asia-Pacific region, which is rapidly urbanizing, Myanmar's urban population of 14 million out of 50 million people is still low when compared to that of neighbouring countries. Major cities and towns are geographically balanced throughout the country. As Myanmar's

economy is based on agriculture, rural development is the priority sector of the national economy.

Considerable success has been achieved in our efforts to improve our people's living standards through building a physical and social infrastructure, in transport, education and health facilities, with a view to developing all regions equally, closing the gap of development between hilly regions and the plains and narrowing the development gap between rural and urban areas.

In the shelter sector, the Government has adopted different strategies for the provision of land and housing. Alternative strategies were implemented in such areas as urban expansion, relocation of services and redevelopment schemes.

The role of the Government in the housing sector has changed from that of housing provider to facilitator and regulator, thus allowing the private sector to share the Government's role in providing housing needs through various means. One of the success stories in squatter upgrading schemes was the introduction of "hut to apartment" projects within the squatter areas, whereby the squatters were accommodated in the allotted apartments after completion of new construction.

As part of the government policy to eradicate poverty in the rural areas, equal opportunities are being provided in such areas of need as provision of health-care facilities, schools, creation of employment opportunities, improved access to drinking water and road construction.

In the area of urban governance, the Government has successfully implemented a series of decentralization initiatives that include the formation of a Yangon City Development Committee and a Mandalay City Development Committee, under the direct supervision of the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council and the Prime Minister. In order to implement development tasks in other major cities and towns, including border areas and rural regions, a new Ministry has been formed to cater to the needs of these regions.

The Government of the Union of Myanmar is endeavouring to raise the living standards of the people, in both urban and rural areas. In this regard, the development of rural areas plays an important role. Our Government emphasizes the harmonious and complementary development of rural and urban regions, with the ultimate aim of the emergence of a peaceful, modern and developed nation.

Over the period from 1988 to the present, we have witnessed the successful cooperation and participation of the private sector and community-based organizations in building safe and sound settlements that are socially and environmentally sustainable. We are aware that we have common concerns in tackling the problem of urbanization. In the process, the unique problems peculiar to each subregion, and especially to each individual country, should also be addressed.

In this new millennium, the greatest challenge for all of us will be the development of sustainable human settlements. Here, the key institutional challenge remains capacity-building at the township level, where the understanding of local needs and conditions will be the prerequisite for effectively carrying out the development mandate.

We are fully confident that this special session, through our sharing of knowledge and learning from each other's success stories, will produce recommendations that will lead to concrete actions in improving the quality of life in cities and human settlements.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Erwin Ortiz Gandarillas, Chairman of the delegation of Bolivia.

Mr. Ortiz Gandarillas (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I should like to convey to Mr. Harri Holkeri my warmest congratulations on his election to preside over this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

First of all, we should like to highlight the importance of this session in the framework of the process of implementation of the Istanbul agreements. We must now assess the situation and review the achievements that have been made as well as the difficulties and obstacles that we have encountered along the way and that remain to be overcome, above all in developing countries. But we also must consider the outlook for the efforts that we are making.

This review and appraisal should take place in the context of a comprehensive approach, taking into account the various aspects and the different

components of the concept of human settlements and their relationship to poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, lack of shelter and services, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups — children, women and indigenous groups. This should be done at the international, national and regional level, but especially at the local level.

We hope that by the end of this session we will have a much clearer vision of where we stand, what remains to be done and where we are going.

At the international level, our delegation, which includes representatives of civil society, would like to reiterate its commitment to the Istanbul Declaration and Agenda. We believe that both constitute a valid and viable platform for international action and cooperation.

We would like to highlight some of the results of the session of the Commission on Human Settlements that took place in Nairobi in February of this year. We believe that the establishment of a committee of permanent representatives as a subsidiary body would fill the void that has existed between sessions of the Commission and would make it possible to provide greater continuity and impetus to the work of the Commission.

A fundamental aspect noted by the Commission is the role that is, and should be, played by local authorities as immediate actors in order to ensure the implementation, in an overall and effective manner, of decentralization processes and of programmes and projects in the area of human settlements.

We also have before us the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. This declaration should provide a fresh impetus to this very necessary process, which aims to provide disadvantaged persons with the minimum conditions required in order to live in dignity.

We believe that at the international level we have an institutional and legal structure that is broad enough not only to promote but also to accelerate the implementation of the objectives of the Habitat Agenda.

We acknowledge that the primary responsibility lies with each of our countries, but within this process of globalization and increasing interdependence, there is also shared responsibility with our developed partners, on the basis of solidarity and cooperation.

This solidarity and cooperation must be expressed through the necessary transfer of financial resources to developing countries through direct investment, official development assistance, debt forgiveness, the opening up of markets, and even the establishment of special funds and the creation of new options in the international financial institutions. Without this solidarity and cooperation, it will be very difficult for our countries to comply with the Istanbul commitments.

At the national level, Bolivia is deploying tremendous efforts to comply with the commitments undertaken at Habitat II and to achieve its objectives. Bolivia has provided a comprehensive report on the implementation of its programme, which takes a comprehensive approach to housing, social development and eradication of poverty, environmental regulation, economic development, governance, international cooperation and current and future initiatives and measures.

Bolivia's new housing policy is based on the right to adequate shelter, through the participation of the people on the basis of the principles of integration, sustainability and social equity.

From an institutional standpoint, the national Government, in considering the serious housing problems facing the Bolivian population, has given ministerial status to the former Under-Secretary for Housing Affairs. He is now the Minister of Housing and Basic Services.

With this reform, the Ministry is developing a policy whose goal is to provide secure land tenure and equal access to land, credit and basic services, thereby promoting the right to adequate housing. In this respect, we have developed a strategy that is based on two pillars: a national housing subsidy programme and a financial market for housing.

The first pillar consists of four subprogrammes. The first is the improvement of neighbourhoods in order to enhance living and sanitary conditions for low-income households in cities with more than 8,000 inhabitants. The subsidy covers 70 per cent, and the other 30 per cent comes from local contributions.

The second subprogramme is the reconstruction of housing units in urban areas in cities that have been affected by earthquakes and fires. Early this year

Bolivia also experienced devastating floods, which destroyed houses in poor communities.

A third subprogramme is aimed at making improvements in areas affected by endemic diseases, such as Chagas' disease, in the southern and south-eastern part of the country. The fourth is a direct-subsidy subprogramme involving two components: a subsidy of $2,500 for the purchase of housing, with a contribution of $350, and another subsidy of $800, with a private contribution of $100, to improve and to expand existing housing.

The financial programme for housing is based on the establishment of a unified system for land registry and property rights and on the creation of a real estate market.

In other areas, Bolivia, within the framework of human settlements, is tackling problems related to social development and the eradication of poverty as a priority for the national Government, through the creation of more jobs, taking into account the protection of the environment, water supply and demand, and reduction of pollution in urban areas.

These policies are reflected in a series of laws such as the Environmental Act, the Forest Act, the Popular Participation Act and the National Service for Agrarian Reform Act.

We are currently drawing up legal instruments related to land planning, urban registry, rural registry, and laws on housing and urbanization.

Allow me to conclude by stating that all of these programmes and efforts may not be adequately implemented if developing countries do not enjoy the cooperation and solidarity of the international community.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Douri, Chairman of the delegation of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Douri (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election as President of this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, and we also congratulate his colleagues, the members of the Bureau. We wish them great success.

Iraq's policy on the improvement of urban settlements and urban centres evolved successfully in the 1970s and 1980s, when the State created a number of organizations and foundations for urban planning and urban communities. It also made large investments to ensure housing for large sectors of the population by the end of the year 2000.

Within the span of a few years, we were able to build housing units as well as infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, the Iraqi housing sector has been affected by external pressure — the aggression carried out by the coalition led by the United States in 1991. That aggression affected most of our infrastructure, factories, power plants, schools, public buildings, dams, bridges and roads, mosques, churches, hospitals, as well as shelters for citizens. Weapons of mass destruction were used, such as depleted uranium, which led to the very serious pollution of our urban areas and harmed the health of our citizens. This resulted in massive destruction and many deaths, not to mention the various diseases that spread like wildfire. Later, an embargo was imposed on Iraq in an unprecedented manner, yet we continue to comply with the guidelines of the Habitat Agenda.

With the limits of the precarious conditions under which we live, we have enacted laws affecting the property structure of the country and which assist the most vulnerable sectors of the population at minimal cost, with concessional credit.

Despite the embargo that has been imposed on our country, Iraq has also taken many steps in social integration policy to reinforce the role and place of women in society and to ensure job opportunities that are suited to their qualifications and social needs. We should also point out along these lines the fact that Iraq has encouraged joint projects between the public and private sectors, strengthening decentralization, local communities and urban centres. This is how local communities have made an effective contribution to land management and to planning.

However, these measures are insufficient and cannot satisfy all our needs as expressed in the Habitat Agenda, especially since Iraq is still deprived of access to its own resources and is still subjected to an overall embargo, not to mention the daily air raids that are carried out by British and American aircraft.

How can we consider the possibility of promoting urbanization, developing our towns and ensuring sustainable development in these circumstances? The only viable answer would be to lift the harmful embargo that has lasted for more than 10 years,

especially since it has lost its raison d'être. This is the only way to resolve the problems that we face. So from this podium we call upon the international community to work seriously to immediately and unconditionally lift the embargo.

Iraq would like to make all sincere efforts to comply with the principles of the Habitat Agenda, and along these lines we affirm: first, the need to put an end to any kind of action against countries for reasons and goals that serve the interests and political and economic hegemonic powers of some big countries. Secondly, the need to strengthen international efforts to determine the scope of destruction and pollution as a result of the use of depleted uranium by the United States against certain countries, including Iraq. Thirdly, while supporting the principle of decentralization in the area of urbanization and of strengthening local communities, we are nonetheless opposed to the use of this principle to impose on developing States a particular form of management. Fourthly, trade liberalization and globalization agreements allow developed countries to impose their power on global trade and the transfer of technology. Fifthly, developed countries must support the commitments that they undertook at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In conclusion, Palestinian towns occupied by the Zionist entity are destroyed daily and face expropriation. The influx of Jewish people into that area and the proliferation of Jewish settlements go against all international laws and norms and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Palestinian population faces all kinds of coercion and daily aggression. The international community is called upon to strongly intervene in order to put an end to this aggression, to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, to restore land to its rightful owners and to rehabilitate Palestinian towns, and to condemn all forms of aggression perpetrated by the Zionist entity in the Golan Heights and in certain other areas of southern Lebanon.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Om Pradhan, Chairman of the delegation of Bhutan.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan): As speakers before me have stressed, the challenges of "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable urban development" have intensified since the Istanbul Conference. Globalization has fuelled urbanization at a rapid pace. Many Governments and cities face enormous pressure to provide even basic services to ever increasing urban populations.

This special session affords us an important opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made so far in implementing the Habitat Agenda, as well as to evaluate the obstacles that have been encountered and to consider a viable course of action.

Shelter is obviously one of the most basic of human needs. Hence, it is important that Governments and the international community continue to accord human settlements a high priority.

In this context, it is pertinent to mention that the challenges of human settlements are compounded not only by rural-to-urban migrations within national boundaries, but also by trans-border migrations, sometimes on a massive scale, of destitute people in search of better livelihoods and living space. This is a prominent feature in our region of South Asia, where one fifth of the world's population lives and where poverty is rampant. Therefore, it is imperative that in order to implement the Habitat Agenda successfully, national efforts must be complemented by international cooperation.

One of the main constraints in implementing the Habitat Agenda in the developing countries, and more so in the least developed among them, is the lack of technical know-how and other resources. This problem has to be addressed seriously, in the context of both official development assistance and concessional financing mechanisms. The International Conference on Financing for Development to be held next year in Mexico will have a good opportunity to look at this issue.

As far as my country Bhutan is concerned, 20 per cent of our population live in urban areas. However, it is expected that within the next two decades, our urban population will increase to over 50 per cent, making it a big challenge for a small country like ours.

The Government's objective is to "achieve a balanced and sustainable development of human settlements, provision of basic infrastructure, conservation of environmental character and culture, and provision of affordable and climatically suitable housing for all".

In keeping with our people-centred socio-economic development policies, the Government provides assistance to all house owners, especially in the rural areas, by way of subsidized timber and group fire insurance. Every possible effort is being made to ensure sanitation, water supply and, where feasible, provision of electricity. Furthermore, in order to overcome the shortage of housing in urban areas, the Government and financial institutions have joined hands to create appropriate affordable housing, wherever feasible.

One of the key national policy objectives that we have been implementing over the last 25 years is decentralization, which takes socio-economic activities right down to the town and village levels. This process has had a positive impact on environmental management, housing, sanitation, water supply, electricity, health and education facilities. It is in this context and in order to ensure that urban planning caters to an expanding population that the Municipal Act of 1999 was also passed by our National Assembly.

In order to give further impetus to human settlements and improve sustainability of urban services, Bhutan has established the National Committee on Human Settlements to look after all aspects in this regard.

In conclusion, my delegation is confident that, given the national and international will and cooperation, our work here at this special session will contribute to making our world a better place for all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Rodrigo Biazon, Chairman of the delegation of the Philippines.

Mr. Biazon (Philippines): At the outset, I congratulate the President and the other members of the Bureau on their election. They may rest assured that my delegation will fully support them in the work ahead of us.

The Philippine Government reaffirms its support of the Habitat Agenda on the provision of adequate shelter for all and the promotion of sustainable development. The right to adequate shelter is enshrined in the Philippine constitution. In translating this mandate into concrete initiatives and measures, the Philippine Government has forged linkages with civil society, the private sector and academia in order to realize the Government's philosophy of building on the initiatives and capabilities of the people while making them partners in development. Beyond paying lip service to the Habitat Agenda, the Philippine Government, since 1996, has installed policies and legislation to implement the Agenda.

Complementing the legislature's efforts, the executive branch has implemented measures to curtail the activities of professional squatters and squatting syndicates and to enhance the comprehensive land-use plans of local government units. This includes reform of the National Urban Development and Housing Framework 1999-2004. The Philippine Government has also implemented programmes to provide security of tenure and to regularize informal settlers occupying public lands. Taking note of the housing requirements of the formal sector, the Philippine Government also established a home lending programme with fund contributions coming from the social security institutions and from other government financial institutions.

There have been many impediments to the provision of adequate shelter to the Filipino people. These include governance problems, the effects of El Niño and La Niña, the Asian financial crisis and the continuous process of rapid urbanization. The Philippines has one of the highest levels of urbanization among Asian countries, estimated recently at 52 per cent as against 48.6 per cent in 1990.

My country's entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) has further exacerbated our urban problems. The Uruguay Round of trade negotiations was expected to bring tangible benefits to my country in the form of improved market access, increased commodity prices through the reduction or elimination of trade-distorting domestic supports and subsidies to agriculture, and a more efficient allocation of resources in agriculture and other sectors. However, that optimism has yet to be justified. Our agricultural sector, wanting as it is in government assistance through land reform, farm-to-market roads, irrigation facilities, sufficient credit, high-quality seed and far greater capital, has yet to benefit from our country's accession to the GATT-WTO. Our farmers' produce cannot compete against the developed countries' subsidized products. Owing to the reduced earnings of Filipino farmers and limited employment opportunities in rural areas, the Philippines has experienced an exodus from the countryside to urban centres. Our

farmers, ironically, are slowly being driven to search for greener pastures in the asphalt jungles of the cities.

As expected, this increasing migration has magnified other urban problems, including traffic congestion, difficulties with urban administration and management, and the lack of employment opportunities. Nevertheless, our country affirms its commitment to resolving these problems. In the next four years, our country's human settlements institutions will continue to establish programmes for the provision of adequate shelter and the promotion of sustainable development by pursuing the enactment of laws to strengthen the policy environment and to facilitate the implementation of strategies to provide adequate shelter for our people.

In the interest of improving international cooperation, we urge the international community to extend support in the following areas. First, we urge a review of the impact of the GATT-WTO on developing countries, especially on their agricultural sector. This merely reiterates what our heads of State or Government concluded at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development. We must strive for the elimination and prohibition of export subsidies, which come in many forms; improved market access for developing countries through tariff reductions; and the elimination of tariff peaks and tariff escalation on products of interest to developing countries. In essence, we must ensure that the international trading system, especially in areas of particular interest to developing countries, is fair, bound by regulations and rule-based to enable developing countries effectively to address their development goals, including non-trade concerns such as shelter and food security, which should not be confused with the issue of food safety.

Secondly, those developed countries that have not yet done so should be urged to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for overall official development assistance.

Thirdly, we urge support for the social development goals of the Millennium Declaration.

We are optimistic that this special session will serve as a venue for Member countries to exchange ideas on issues affecting the provision of adequate shelter and sustainable development. Let us take this opportunity to forge a consensus, address the housing problem and formulate viable solutions in our fight against poverty.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sélim Tadmoury, Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation is particularly pleased to be participating in the work of this special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Because the session is taking place at the beginning of the third millennium, we must be careful to make an accurate appraisal of what has been achieved in terms of the Habitat Agenda and to consider the outlook for the future.

I must observe that the documents before the Assembly have been of considerable help in that connection. Let me highlight the report of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (A/S-25/2). That report is characterized by transparency, and it objectively describes what is taking place on the regional and international levels; it addresses the question of removing obstacles that have prevented us from implementing the Habitat Agenda.

On the basis of a study of national reports and of the outcome of regional meetings held since 1996, we can affirm that the results have been positive and that we are prepared to implement the goals of the Habitat Agenda.

We would point in particular to adequate shelter and the sustainable development of human settlements in all forms, not to mention the achievements that have been made in security of tenure and urban governance, in implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

The subject before us is part of a complex whole that includes problems of social and economic development, environment, poverty eradication, urban planning, rural exodus to cities and globalization. The second millennium saw an impressive number of meetings and conferences that emphasized studies. In the third millennium, we need to move to real implementation and efforts to establish human settlements adapted to modern needs. It might be difficult to discuss all the aspects of the problem of human settlements here today, but in the context of this

session it is very important to stress certain points of concern to my delegation.

First and foremost is globalization. This phenomenon was the subject of discussion at the Millennium Summit and is having a real impact on human settlements at a time when cities offer access to technology and exchanges of ideas, goods and human contact. Globalization has left a huge gap between the strongest, who have grown richer, and the weakest, who have been stripped of opportunity. In spite of this, strong and weak alike are paying the price of globalization on an equal footing.

It is important to see the influence of globalization on large metropolitan areas, especially in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. In the countries of those regions, we can identify two separate strata, one adapted to and benefiting from globalization and the other losing ground. It is up to the Members of this Organization to mitigate the negative impact of globalization on human settlements, to redistribute its costs and to eliminate poverty. Globalization has engendered hotspots of poverty and shantytowns throughout the world, as well as violence and social imbalances.

Solving the problem of urban poverty and human settlements should be a focus of the private and public sectors alike, as well as of the institutions of civil society. We would suggest the establishment of an international fund under United Nations auspices that could help eradicate poverty and halve its incidence by 2015. This would involve an important contribution from local authorities. The development of municipalities and democratic institutions will promote good governance and have a positive impact on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. It is also important to note that legal infrastructures must be adapted to allow us to achieve our goals for human settlements. Ownership laws must be overhauled and a financial system encouraging low-interest, long-term loans must be secured.

As to human settlements, it is very important to point out the need to protect the demographic composition and cultures of occupied territories. It is unjust to transfer inhabitants from their homes. We need to respect international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel must abide by the provisions of that treaty in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights. Israel, the occupying Power, should respect legitimate international resolutions in order to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

My country suffered a great deal from Israel's occupation of its southern region for 22 years. Israel destroyed a large number of human settlements and other sectors of the country also saw the destruction of their infrastructure over the course of 15 years. In 10 years, my country has achieved a great deal and has reconstructed its towns, especially the capital, Beirut, taking into account the need for balance between the environment and human needs. We have also enhanced the legal system and are working to establish urbanization projects in the northern and southern suburbs of Beirut and to rehabilitate human settlements in the southern part of the country. We appeal for the support of the international financial institutions and of donor countries for these projects, which will further our objectives with respect to human settlements. We need a minimum of international cooperation.

My delegation feels that the draft declaration on towns and human settlements in the context of the new millennium represents an important step forward. We support the United Nations in its local, regional and international efforts to establish the necessary conditions for viable human settlements, allowing modern humankind to focus its energy on creating a better world.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dirk Jan van den Berg, Chairman of the delegation of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands): It is an honour and privilege for me to address the Assembly at this special session on behalf of the delegation of the Netherlands.

Reports prepared for this special session clearly indicate that we are still far away from the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Therefore, Istanbul+5 offers us no time for complacency. On the contrary, there is an urgent need to focus on what still has to be done. The two flagship reports presented to this session are the *Global Report on Human Settlements* and the *State of the World's Cities* report for 2001.

These reports clearly set out the formidable tasks ahead. They are indispensable reading material for all those engaged in habitat policy development. We

strongly support the proposal to update these reports on a biannual basis; they are important tools for integrating the habitat dimension in the work of Governments and of international organizations. The Habitat Agenda should be fed into the work of the United Nations funds and agencies on a continuing basis. We simply cannot afford to discuss these issues at a five-year interval cycle. The urgency of the matter is reflected in the support at last year's Millennium Summit for the Cities without Slums initiative. This clearly signals awareness of the Habitat challenges at the highest level.

The two flagship reports and the documentation presented to this special session by the Executive Director of Habitat present us with strong arguments that sound Habitat policies should be cross-cutting and inclusive: not just shelter, but also sanitation, health, sustainable construction, infrastructure, spatial planning and integrated urban development. This calls for a comprehensive approach at the national and local levels. This comprehensive approach must also be reflected in our policies on international cooperation.

Implementation is not a top/down issue. National Governments have a major role to play, but they are dependent on local authorities and civil society at large. Local authorities — whether representing small or large communities — are of key significance to reaching our common habitat objectives. They should be sufficiently empowered so as to achieve good governance. I therefore welcome the commitment of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) at its meeting in May 2001 in Rio de Janeiro to intensify its collaboration with Habitat. IULA considers the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements (UNCHS) the key link between local authorities and the United Nations system. IULA's support for the Habitat Centre Global Campaign for Secure Tenure is essential. In this context, it is interesting to mention that in many countries an encouraging trend towards increased cooperation between local authorities and the private sector has become manifest. Such public-private partnerships are providing many examples of mutual benefit.

Local, regional and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), many of which are present at this special session, are also key players in representing the interests of citizens in relation to human settlement issues. Women and women's organizations play a decisive role in securing equal rights relating to security of rental and ownership tenure and to mortgages. However, as the flagship reports show, women seeking the implementation of these rights meet obstacles. My delegation would like to reiterate that these rights have already been acknowledged in the Habitat Agenda, and that we should increase our efforts to overcome these obstacles.

The "Declaration on Cities and other Human Settlements in the New Millennium" will hopefully be a means to further implement the Habitat Agenda. As a political document, it deserves due attention on political agendas and can also serve as an instrument to generate means for the development of shelter and human settlements. Poverty eradication in terms of habitat means that we should ultimately eliminate — and not just improve or regulate — slums and squatter settlements.

This year, the Netherlands is commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of its national housing act. We have come a long way since the beginning of the twentieth century. A lot still remains to be done. A recently published policy paper of my Government has reviewed our accomplishments and has explored possible future policy lines in terms of human settlement development. A central, recurrent notion in that policy paper is the central role of individual people, their needs and wants. Authorities and other actors must be more receptive to what various categories of consumers in the housing market actually want. For an urbanizing country like the Netherlands — more than 80 per cent of the present population lives in urban areas — it is important to involve and engage citizens and their organizations in the preparation and the execution of integrated urban regeneration plans.

Therefore, an important precondition for local governments to obtain relevant subsidies is the existence of such plans and the evident involvement of society in these plans. So, civil society — NGOs and CBOs — and democratic local authorities play a pivotal role in our urban policy. There is no advantage or time gained by cutting out their participation, neither here nor elsewhere.

An important Dutch national NGO, the Habitat Platform, is actively engaged in promoting local participation in the Netherlands. This Platform devotes

a substantial part of its resources to raising awareness of global habitat issues. This is one example of how we in the Netherlands are implementing the Habitat Agenda. The national report on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda since Istanbul will give you further information. It is being distributed at this special session.

We hope that we can discuss the Habitat Agenda implementation on a regular basis. Let us work towards concrete and tangible results. Let us make sure that the biannual update of the flagship reports will show us encouraging progress. In short, let us reinvigorate the Habitat spirit.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, head of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today at United Nations Headquarters at the start of the new millennium to review comprehensively the goals implemented and adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in 1996. We are also meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the efforts made in our countries with a view to achieving universal population development.

Shelter is a basic need in man's life. On this basis, various Governments accord this question special attention. They develop plans designed to ensure healthy housing units with enough land to absorb an increasing population, as well as appropriate and varied building materials, in addition to providing services and facilities to housing areas.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is making great efforts to achieve all the goals it has set and plans to fulfil its responsibilities in this regard. Syrian law guarantees housing rights. It also contains provisions against eviction and the stripping of ownership. There are no barriers in Syria preventing women from possessing housing or land, and no barriers preventing them from acquiring mortgages in their names. There are also no barriers to women's inheritance of land.

The Syrian Arab Republic enjoys an advanced system of ownership rights and a legal system for renting land and developing housing. Our residential policies include development trends designed to achieve optimum benefits from water resources and provide basic services to the majority of the population.

This is in addition to safeguarding housing for the various social groupings, with the participation and the contribution of the private, public and cooperative sectors, in order to cope with the natural growth of population and to counter the accompanying effects of rapid urbanization and the results of emigration from the countryside to the cities.

Our development strategies are designed to divide up residential areas in a fair way and to improve standards of living in both rural and urban areas, as well as to close gaps in the provision of services and reduce migration to urban centres, thereby minimizing the problems associated with cities and with the establishment of random communities in their vicinity.

The management of human settlements is the responsibility of local councils, down to the village level, which deal with conditions in each town and village, setting out plans to enhance their development in keeping with the conditions and requirements of each residential community.

Enhancing international cooperation is an important step towards resolving the housing problem. This requires national efforts, as well as an appropriate external environment and effective international cooperation. Improving conditions in human settlements in developing countries is an important step towards improving their standing at the international level. We believe that developed countries have a duty to demonstrate the necessary political will to create an appropriate international environment for the social and economic development of developing countries. Developed countries must also respect and implement their commitments in the field of international cooperation through the guaranteeing of financial resources, the transfer of technology, debt cancellation and the opening of international markets. Such measures would enhance the ability of developing countries to deal with the problems of human settlements.

In considering the improvement of conditions in human settlements, we should not be distracted from focusing on the problems to which such settlements are being subjected as a result of war and conflicts and natural disasters in several parts of the world. During our meetings, many delegations have referred to the suffering of their peoples as a result of such factors. In

the Middle East, the destruction of human settlements and the environment and the deprivation of the right of the Arabs to benefit from them is a systematic policy pursued by Israel through its occupation of Arab territories in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.

The world witnessed this during the visit of His Holiness John Paul II to the city of Quneitra, which was completely destroyed by Israel before it pulled out in 1974. The city remains as it was left, a witness to the brutality of the Israeli occupation and Israel's lack of respect for international values, treaties and conventions, to say nothing of the principles of international humanitarian law. After occupying the Syrian Golan in 1967, Israel, persistent in its defiance of international legitimacy and the Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, evicted the Syrian population. At that time the population was 130,000; it is now 500,000. Israel evicted them from 244 cities, villages and farms, which it then destroyed.

Israel built or is finishing about 40 settlements in place of the towns and villages that it destroyed. When the Syrian citizens who were not evicted by Israel try to build new houses, Israel cuts off the water and electricity supply, in preparation for destroying those dwellings on the pretext that they have no building permits — but they have no such permits because Israel refuses to grant them.

Israel continues to defy Security Council resolution 497 (1981) of 17 December 1981, which calls upon it to rescind its decision to annex the Syrian Golan and refrain from changing its geographic and demographic nature. This is also the case with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call upon Israel to fully withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. Israel also flouts and rejects General Assembly resolutions relating to the occupied Syrian Golan.

The destruction of houses in the Palestinian occupied territories has become a systematic policy pursued by Israel. They are a direct target for its planes, tanks, guns and bulldozers. Israel does not hesitate to perpetrate such acts, which run counter to all international norms and values. Instead, it invents pretexts to justify such practices. Tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza strip and Jerusalem have been displaced by Israel; they have been evicted from their homes and their houses have been destroyed. This is taking place in Jerusalem for reasons that are well known, the most significant of which is the attempt to Judaize that Arab city. Today, there are more than 200 Israeli colonies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The Israeli Government announces daily the establishment of new colonies — despite the peace process, and despite the condemnation levelled at it by the international community for these abominable practices.

In this connection, we would like to refer to Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980). They state that such settlement activities are illegal and unlawful. They also state that settlement activities pose a danger to the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In addition, such settlement activities curb the growth of local Palestinian communities, and this in turn has social and economic repercussions on the citizens of Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan, as stated time and again by the General Assembly in many of its resolutions.

The current Israeli Government is trying to consolidate its position and entrench its policy by building more settlements and expanding those that already exist in accordance with the policy declared by Sharon to strengthen settlement activities — activities that are internationally rejected.

Allow me, in conclusion, to express our appreciation for the efforts made by the Commission on Human Settlements to prepare for this special session. Rest assured that the Syrian delegation will cooperate with the President to make this important session a success.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Roland Kpotsra, Chairman of the delegation of Togo.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo) (*spoke in French*): The century that has just come to a close was marked not only by considerable scientific and technological progress, but also by unbridled urbanization, which, by all appearances, will continue at an even more accelerated pace in the years to come. A sign of development, this urbanization is unfortunately accompanied by many problems that are very difficult to resolve and that may well be harmful to our societies if effective and urgent measures are not taken to minimize their effects.

Indeed, half of the more than 6 billion people on the planet live in cities today, as compared to only 29 per cent in the middle of the last century. According to projections, this growth of the urban population will be even greater in the developing countries, where problems related particularly to the rural exodus, housing, access to basic services, employment and the environment are intensifying. In a number of cities in the developing countries, the poor functioning of city administrations, the collapsing infrastructure and the rise in violence and crime have had negative effects on economic growth, the quality of life and working conditions. Other factors, such as the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and increased poverty have only further exacerbated the already precarious socio-economic situation in the developing world, in particular in Africa.

The international community continues to face these many challenges in particular by holding major international conferences, including the Istanbul Habitat Conference, the implementation of whose decisions we are here reviewing and evaluating. In order to remedy the disturbing situation, the international community has committed itself to taking action at all levels to combat the deterioration in quality of life through the harmonious development of human settlements and by combating unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation. Hence, the Habitat Agenda, the implementation of which we are now evaluating, recommended mobilizing adequate financial resources at all levels, including new and additional multinational, bilateral, public and private resources to improve the living conditions of hundreds of millions of poor and inadequately sheltered people throughout the world.

Despite the socio-economic crisis that has shaken the country during recent years and the economic recession that has affected the harmonious development of human settlements, the Togolese authorities have, in implementing this Agenda, undertaken actions aimed at achieving a sustainable improvement in the nature and quality of life of our people. Thus, we have translated into action the commitments made in Istanbul.

In this regard, it is worth noting that we adopted in 1998 a law on decentralization, a national population policy and a national policy on the environment, and in 2001 a national urban policy declaration. In addition, a national housing strategy is now being drafted. It is also worth noting that in Togo all interested partners — parliamentarians, researchers, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, associations and the private sector — have been closely involved in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Without a doubt this Agenda can be fully implemented only if the international community provides suitable support for these national measures.

Allow me from this rostrum to pay a well-deserved tribute to all of our partners who have steadfastly remained with us during these difficult periods our country has been going through. We particularly welcome the ever-growing role being played by the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, to ensure that everywhere in the world human settlements will be increasingly viable and will promote social integration.

Despite the progress that has been achieved in implementing the Habitat Agenda, we must recognize that a number of obstacles continue to hinder its full implementation. This is why, at the dawn of this new millennium, it is up to the international community to work resolutely to ensure the full implementation of the fundamental objectives of the Istanbul Declaration and of the Habitat Agenda: "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world". In this regard, at this time of globalization — during which solidarity and interdependence are of higher priority than ever in order to ensure the equitable development of all the world's regions — we should bear in mind the thoughts so well expressed by President John F. Kennedy:

> "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." (*Inaugural address, 20 January 1961*)

The Acting President: I give the floor to Ms. Irene Wiese-von Ofen, President of the Habitat Professionals Forum.

Ms. Wiese-von Ofen (Habitat Professionals Forum): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Habitat Professionals Forum. The Habitat Professionals Forum was established in 1999 at the initiative of the International Federation for Housing and Planning, the International Union of Architects, the International Federation of Surveyors, the International Society of City and Regional Planners, the Centre for African Settlement Studies and

Development and the Arab Urban Development Institute. The Forum was organized under the auspices of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).

The word forum means a platform, a place where information is brought in order to communicate with others. The Habitat Professionals Forum is not a club with members nor an organization with statutes, but a partnership of sovereign organizations and institutes working together to address worldwide problems related to population increase and homelessness, planning, housing and human settlements. The Forum is open to other international non-governmental organizations that work on topics related to the Habitat Agenda. The Forum can help to establish networks and to share knowledge and experiences.

The awareness of different governmental levels and their action is essential for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. But in addition to these governmental commitments, civil society should take into consideration that the implementation of the principles of sustainability is a continuous learning process.

Learning needs to occur on different levels of overlapping non-governmental fields of training and cooperation in order to transform our current way of life into a more sustainable one. Non-governmental organizations, acting as mediators, can use their commitment, professional talents and experience to help resolve these difficult processes laden with conflicts.

Looking at the differing speeds worldwide of technical and economical structural changes, at the more indolent and more traditional socio-political structures, and at the ecological processes with their own long-lasting laws of nature and continued evolution, one needs experts to solve these problems.

In every country, there are highly educated experts with special expertise, but they often do not have enough experience or the support of their local authorities and are not part of an international network that helps to exchange ideas and innovative approaches. Therefore, the challenge is to provide training for better interdisciplinary and intergovernmental cooperation. The Habitat Professionals Forum, related to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), addresses this challenge by offering a platform for professionals to meet one another, just as we have been doing in free workshops during the days of this special session.

Knowledge and expertise in the various disciplines — urban and regional planning, traffic and transportation planning, architecture and ecology, sociology and law, health and culture, sciences and economy, statistics and geographic information, and surveying and land administration — are the preconditions for solving the problems of human settlements on the technical side of this tremendous task. In order to address the human side of the task, "shelter for all", we need participation of the people — families, women, children — as well as of companies, firms, institutions, enterprises and so on. Any change in physical structure leads to a change in social composition. Contemporary architecture must respond with precision to social requirements, and architectural beauty needs to be an important defining factor of the cities in which we live. Without sound land administration there is no sustainable solution to housing problems.

Professional experts are ready to add their expertise and knowledge to the pool of experience in the following ways: to organize forums together with UNCHS to exchange the best practices; to organize national forums upon invitation from local governments; to include the principles of the Habitat Agenda in educational curricula and research agendas; to help mediate between investors and inhabitants, if we are asked to do so; to give recommendations to Governments in order to establish partnerships and to achieve quality in architecture and urban planning, construction, and land registration and management; and to work worldwide towards an integrated social and technical approach to addressing the problems of human settlements.

In the interest of time, we ask the Assembly to take the opportunity to read what we have offered in our longer written statement.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Mr. Ernesto Gil Elorduy, President of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat.

Mr. Elorduy (Global Parliamentarians on Habitat) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome those who have made the strengthening of peace, international cooperation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms the principal reason for their moral commitment. I share the conviction that peace is

built on social equity and on the progress of our peoples.

It is a great honour for me, as a Mexican senator, to take the floor in the plenary of the General Assembly of the United Nations on behalf of and as the representative of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat. This great distinction is evidence of the Assembly's interest in listening to the views of legislators.

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, Ms. Anna Tibaijuka.

The dawn of the new millennium leads us to reflect on the future of our societies in the face of globalization, a commitment to which all States, Governments and parliaments must rise as a moral imperative of human existence and values. Parliamentarians promote government actions based on norms of civilized conduct that comprise a legislative framework which gives legality to and supports the processes of development and the links between people and their political representatives. Because of their constitutional origins, democratic character and national responsibility, congresses and parliaments must be present in building the new international order. We are a genuine product of democracy, which we understand to mean a system of living that is based on steady improvement in the economic, social and cultural lives of the people.

Since its creation at the Yokohama meeting in 1987, Global Parliamentarians on Habitat has sought to promote the sustainable development of human settlements and the goal of adequate shelter for all. This decision was both correct and timely. The participation of parliaments in the international agenda is of the utmost importance.

The United Nations, by its very nature, adopts a more global perspective on issues. This is, therefore, the forum that must create greater public awareness of the major global issues and challenges that we face. On the other hand, the very essence of parliamentary representation is direct and immediate involvement in policy at the social and local levels. Communication between these two worlds — cooperation between the United Nations system and legislative bodies — is therefore becoming increasingly necessary.

We welcome the decision to create the legal entity of the Habitat centre, and we are confident that coordination with the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat can be ensured in order to provide legal assistance to the countries that request it. The global group will support the implementation of the programme of work of the Habitat centre for the period 2001-2002, as it relates to the issuance of juridical ordinances that provide for secure land tenure in the context of an accelerated process of urbanization to promote good urban governance and safer cities.

There is a need for committed action on the part of parliaments to reinforce and reassess legislative action as an essential part of the democratic process, sustainable development, protection of the environment and the fight against poverty. We propose that groups similar to Global Parliamentarians on Habitat might be formed to assist — with their political experience, their legislative powers and democratic legitimacy — in other programmes and actions that the United Nations might consider appropriate and to provide a legal framework for addressing the various problems faced by the countries of our world.

The United Nations has opened its doors to legislators on an important item on its agenda — namely, Habitat. It is not idle to recall that the commitments and changes that are being proposed for achieving the goals of this Agenda will have more strength and better direction with the support of parliaments. The future can be achieved and guaranteed only through the law. To those who still believe that the law is not everything, we say that without good laws, everything is nothing.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations A/S-25/PV.4

General Assembly
Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

4th meeting
Thursday, 7 June 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda items 8, 9 and 10 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Joseph Oliva Franklin, Director General of the National Office of Old-Age Insurance of Haiti.

Mr. Franklin (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): With the expansion of social housing policies, especially in the context of modernization, priority must be given to human settlements as well as to health care and education. In Haiti, Habitat II has given fresh impetus to efforts in the human settlements sector, which has led the State to elaborate a new policy in this area.

Today, in the general context of globalization, liberalization of the economy, greater availability of information and increased decentralization of social and political life, this special session gives us the opportunity to reaffirm the commitments we have undertaken with respect to the Habitat Agenda as well as our common determination to decide on the measures and initiatives that must be taken in order to implement it.

Since Istanbul, Haiti has been deploying intensive efforts in this area. However, many obstacles continue to hinder our work.

Let me touch on the main problems affecting the human settlements sector.

First, there is insufficient production of housing units and a tremendous shortage of housing, infrastructure and services — the result of not enough land in urban areas, even for State projects. This has led to an uncontrolled use of the land, with the attendant risks to the environment. Secondly, technical and institutional resources are insufficient for the promotion of housing, infrastructures and services.

These problems are rooted, in particular, in the lack of financial resources in the country; the fragility of the State, and in particular of the local authorities, which hinders the decentralization process; and the absence of appropriate legislation and information networks that are suited to today's realities.

In resolving these problems and in the implementation of Habitat II, the State of Haiti, with the assistance of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the United Nations Development Programme, decided to create an intersectoral committee on human settlements responsible for developing a human settlements and housing policy.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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That policy, which was introduced in May 1997, aims to deal with the human settlements crisis with a view to achieving a better balance between the requirements of economic development, protection of the environment and improvement of the living conditions of the poorest sectors of society.

Among the myriad government efforts aimed at the implementation of this policy are an analysis of the environmental profile of the capital; urban redevelopment programmes; and four projects for the construction of residential units near the capital, with a fifth in the country's third city, Les Cayes.

Other initiatives are under way, involving efforts by other actors, whose goal is to raise the awareness of the general public and to mobilize resources. These deserve to be mentioned in their own right: an urban planning week, a seminar/workshop on decentralized planning, and a workshop on housing.

Since President Jean Bertrand Aristide took power on 7 February 2001, the Government is hewing to a policy of continuity in the area of human settlements. The major programmes being considered relate to roads, ports and airports, transportation, energy, communications and housing. In this respect, the Government intends, among other things, to set up a land development programme; determine the focal points of urban areas on the basis of their potential; revise land-related legislation; build adequate and affordable housing for all; and work jointly with the traditional financial sector, public housing agencies, municipalities and micro-credit cooperatives. Efforts will be made in the context of programmes to rehabilitate shantytowns, and rural areas will also be the focus of attention.

Particular attention will be given to the construction of administrative complexes in towns and districts, the restoration of historic buildings and the modernization of equipment in public offices.

Uncontrolled urban growth will have increasingly direct repercussions on the majority of the population in terms of health, education and law and order. It will give rise to new forms of marginalization, both economic and social, and will thus represent a threat to the stability of the democratic system. Soon, in 2004, the Republic of Haiti will celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of its independence, and the challenges we must meet are tremendous.

We are in a trap of sorts: our weak economy is undermining our efforts to improve our economic policy and eradicate poverty. Our investment needs are tremendous, as the physical infrastructure is shockingly inadequate. Indeed, in the areas of training human resources, health care and the maintenance of an effective civil service, we will rely greatly on our partners with a view to enhancing prospects for the well-being of the people of Haiti, in particular the most vulnerable segments of the population: women, children and the destitute.

We hope that the Member States and the United Nations system as a whole will note the efforts that have already been made and help Haiti in its determined efforts to overcome the many difficulties facing it on the path to development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Nicky Iyambo, Minister of Regional and Local Government and Housing of Namibia.

Mr. Iyambo (Namibia): It is a pleasure for me and my delegation to see you, Mr. President, presiding over this important session. We are confident that your experience and leadership will guide us as we review and appraise the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). This session marks an important milestone in the history of Habitat, and we therefore hope that it will contribute substantially to the improvement of human settlements and thus be a dream realized.

As part of its commitment to the Habitat Agenda, the Government of Namibia established the National Habitat Committee to coordinate and monitor the process of implementing the Habitat Agenda. The preparation of our national country report coincided with the formulation of the Second National Development Plan. Indeed, this was a very rewarding exercise that enabled us to evaluate and assess the human settlement situation in the country and also to identify constraints, challenges and strategies in the implementation process. In addition, relevant policies, legislation, programmes and other interventions have since been formulated within the framework of the Habitat Agenda.

Housing has been identified by the Government of Namibia as one of the priority areas in the development of the country. Our Constitution emphasizes the promotion of equal access to adequate and affordable shelter, water, a safe environment and

other basic services as an integral part of the fundamental rights and freedoms to be enjoyed by the people of Namibia. The housing programme in Namibia has added value to the social and economic well-being of low-income families. In this context, low-income groups are enabled to have access to land and enjoy security of tenure. In this exercise, emphasis is placed on community participation in the construction of the houses. This process provides employment opportunities to small builders and their families, resulting in the reduction of poverty and unemployment.

Despite these concerted efforts of the Government and its partners, the population growth in the cities places a tremendous demand on housing and basic services. Rural-urban migration is increasing. However, to reverse the rural-urban migration trend, we have identified new growth points, and 13 towns were proclaimed during the implementation of our First National Development Plan.

The promotion of a just society for all has been duly attended to and is reflected in legislation and policies instituted by the Government, such as the Affirmative Action Act, Married Persons Equality Act and the national policy on disability. At the same time, various government institutions have been given the task of promoting equal opportunity and social integration for disadvantaged groups. A social housing programme has been developed that targets old-age pensioners, persons with disabilities and destitute people, thereby enhancing a sense of esteem and dignity among these groups.

In spite of these efforts, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the scarcity of water in Namibia have a negative impact on development projects that are intended to reduce poverty. In this connection, our Cabinet has approved White Papers on HIV/AIDS and water resource management.

With regard to economic development, the Government provides incentives for the informal business sector through a guaranteed credit scheme. Small business entrepreneurs have access to financial institutions where they can obtain loans to start their own businesses. Eighty per cent of these loans are guaranteed by the Government. This initiative not only enhances economic empowerment of poor groups, but it also reduces unemployment and alleviates poverty. These incentives are in line with the principles of the Habitat Agenda and the global plan of action, as well as the aims and objectives of Agenda 21 to ensure sustainable development.

It pleases me to inform this Assembly that decentralization of power to the regional and local authorities, as enshrined in the Namibian Constitution, has progressively continued since 1998. Through the decentralization process the people at the grass-roots level are able to partake in the decision-making processes affecting their lives. To ensure effective planning and implementation of the decentralization process, development committees have been established at local, constituency and regional levels.

Regarding international cooperation, the Government of Namibia, as a signatory to the Istanbul Declaration, will continue to coordinate with other Governments and other Habitat Agenda partners to exchange ideas and learn from their experiences in the struggle for "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements".

Furthermore, the Government through the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing, in partnership with the National Housing Enterprise and community-based organizations, has committed itself to establishing a research centre, which, among other tasks, will provide information on the availability of local building materials and best building methods. It is the intention of the Government to utilize national and international expertise to help in enriching the research portfolio of the centre.

In conclusion, the Government of Namibia reaffirms its commitment to the objectives of the Habitat Agenda, "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development". Namibia will explore all possibilities at our disposal to achieve those objectives. In this endeavour, we are part of the global family, and we believe that our success will be determined by our commitment to achieve what we have set as our goal.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Natan Sharansky, Minister of Construction and Housing of Israel.

Mr. Sharansky (Israel): Israel's allegiance to the Habitat Agenda places our citizens at the focus of all our policies for shelter and sustainable development. We have developed integrated housing solutions for various population groups, with strategies that

recognize the differing needs and abilities of our citizens.

In order to promote homeownership, we provide subsidized mortgages for all first-time home-buyers, based on established socio-economic criteria. The combination of progressive mortgage packages, transparent criteria and privatized servicing has allowed us to reach an overall homeownership level of more than 70 per cent.

Our high level of homeownership is quite remarkable in the light of our history of immigrant absorption. Over the past decade, Israel has successfully absorbed more than 1 million immigrants, many of them poor families from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, representing an increase of approximately 20 per cent of our national population. To help immigrant absorption, our Government provides especially generous mortgage packages, which have resulted in a homeownership rate among new immigrants that is virtually as high as that of the general population.

I can personally attest to the effectiveness of these shelter policies, since I myself came to Israel as a new immigrant in the late 1980s and benefited from our country's assistance programmes.

I wish to emphasize that our policy of immigrant absorption has operated alongside our commitment to meet the needs of veteran Israeli households. We have developed special assistance packages for young couples, single-parent households, single persons, the elderly and persons with physical disabilities. They are available without exception to the entire spectrum of Israeli society, veterans and immigrants, Jews and Arabs. Furthermore, to help promote sustainable development nationwide I, as Minister of the Interior, sponsored the preparation of numerous master plans, including almost 30 local outlying plans, for Arab cities and towns.

Certain delegations have regrettably chosen to appropriate the present session to level unfounded political attacks against Israel, rather than contribute in a productive manner to the discussion. I sincerely regret that I am now obliged to depart from my intended statement to address those accusations.

I come here straight from the heartbreaking funerals where parents buried 20 teenage daughters and sons who were brutally massacred in a Tel Aviv discotheque this past Friday. Even after witnessing such gruesome carnage — the most recent and most violent manifestation of an eight-month terror campaign — Israel is exercising restraint. In the meantime, in order to give peace yet another chance, we have chosen not to use our military capabilities. In spite of that unprecedented policy of restraint, we are being accused, from this rostrum, of using excessive force. In fact, Israel is facing an unparalleled and coordinated campaign of terror orchestrated by the Palestinian leadership, which has also contributed scores of soldiers to this war by releasing convicted terrorists from Palestinian jails.

We, as housing ministers and habitat experts, all know that a strong foundation is critical for building a durable structure. The Oslo peace process, which once offered so much promise, was founded on a commitment to non-violence, based on our hope that the terrorists of yesterday had become our partners for peace. Eight years later, the leaders, who have once again become the indisputable champions of terrorism, are threatening the structure of peace.

We empathize with the suffering of the Palestinians, but the fact remains that much of their suffering is the result of the misguided policies of their own leadership. The achievement of a true and durable peace will be realized only when Governments are accountable to their peoples and are truly committed to the advancement and welfare of their citizens.

As for Israel's 6 million citizens, who do indeed live under a democratic Government, they are being blackmailed by terrorists who are striving to make life's daily routine unbearable and who are falsely portraying settlements as the central obstacle to peace. The international community must not legitimize this pursuit of political objectives through violence and terrorism.

Israel is a country that is at the forefront of the free world's struggle against terrorism. Surrendering to the blackmail of terrorists will inevitably encourage and strengthen them throughout the world. Accordingly, it should be in the interest of all free nations to work together to subdue terrorist organizations and to prevent them from subverting the will of free peoples.

In our case, it was previously agreed that the issue of settlements would be raised within the context of bilateral negotiations on a final status agreement.

Cessation of violence, by contrast, is not a matter to be negotiated or to be switched on and off at will. The cessation of violence is a basic precondition of all compromises entailed in the peace process. That formula dates back to 1993, and is one to which both parties have agreed.

The cessation of violence is also the central recommendation of the report of the Mitchell Committee, which Israel has endorsed in all its aspects. This remains the cornerstone of all the other measures that are to follow. Terror and violence must stop before we can move forward.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming Israel's commitment to the goals and principles of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, and to the need to promote integrated urban and regional growth. We must reconfirm the interdependence of human settlements around the globe and work to enhance the living conditions of all 6 billion citizens of the world. Israel looks forward to the day when safe and secure shelter will be achieved and when the dictum of the prophet Isaiah will finally be realized: peace, peace for those both far and near.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Seydou Sy Sall, Minister of Town Planning and National and Regional Development of Senegal.

Mr. Sall (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Bureau on your election, and to wish you every success in guiding the work of the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). I pay special tribute to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, and to applaud the admirable thrust of his opening statement.

This session is taking place at a crucial time in the history of the United Nations, when most of the questions asked by States and peoples about the management of human settlements remain unanswered. Senegal understands the importance of the Istanbul achievements. That is why, in line with the position of the African Group, we strongly support the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). Senegal welcomes the recent appointment of Ms. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka as Executive Director of Habitat; she will enjoy the unreserved support of my Government.

The delegation of Senegal attaches great importance to the present special session. It must remind mankind of the crucial need to strengthen the fight against poverty and the lack of security, which are the two major obstacles to controlled urban growth and to improving the living conditions of urban populations.

The new human settlements policy formulated by His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, is in line with that approach. An important part of that policy is the strengthening of policies and mechanisms to give direction to the Habitat II follow-up process.

Let me outline some of Senegal's activities to implement the Habitat Agenda.

I would recall first that, last January, Senegal adopted a new Constitution following a referendum. It formally guarantees the right to property ownership to men and women alike. All of the earlier impediments to that right, be they legal or customary, were eliminated. The new Constitution gives women the right to receive land, own it and to manage their own patrimony and personal property. It also includes rights for the handicapped and the aged.

At another level, it lays particular stress on the development of the organizational capacity of local communities, which now enjoy broader authority. This allows the daily management of human settlements to fall primarily to local authorities. Moreover, I am pleased to recall that, in entrenching the process of decentralization, regionalism has been practised since 1996. This is a decisive milestone in our search for harmonious development between towns and rural areas in our region and helps to strengthen its economy. The adoption of a local communities charter, as set forth by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), allowing more openness in the activities of local authorities in the management of human settlements, should consolidate these achievements.

In addition, in response to the many difficulties encountered in coordination by urban entities, our country recently adopted a 10-year urbanization programme in the region of Dakar, the capital, at the heart of which is the establishment of a joint

committee. This 10-year programme, an integral part of the plan of action adopted this year by the Government in the urban planning and habitat sector, is designed, as recommended by Habitat II, to enhance private initiative and to promote a synergetic participation of local authorities, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and populations. The production of housing will be facilitated by means of regular contact between the State and its various partners. This strategy is expected to yield a yearly output from developers and housing cooperatives of 12,000 housing units.

With respect to infrastructure, the follow-up to Habitat II has been characterized by an intensification of the policy of establishing social networks in the distribution of water. Important programmes are being undertaken in this field. These programmes also aim at reducing the water shortage in Dakar and secondary centres by setting up an effective and operational distribution system for drinking water by means of modern and reliable networks.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I would like to mention the strategy developed within the new policy for restructured land tenure, which has been strengthened by the establishment of the Droit à la Ville Foundation to coordinate the activities of the various actors in this field. The restructuring, which has already begun, will allow the land-tenure situation of over 100,000 families to be regularized and substantially to improve their living conditions. The land-tenure restructuring and regularization will be pursued with the international support. They will be given high priority in the programmes launched by the various actors involved in human settlements management. Improving the people's living conditions is an important aspect of these activities and an integral part of the national anti-poverty campaign that has just been launched with the invaluable help of the United Nations Development Programme.

Finally, in order to bolster the activities under way in my country, legislative and regulatory texts governing the management of this sector will be adapted to the new environment of decentralization. This adaptation will focus primarily on the urban planning code, the revision of which was recently completed, and on the building code currently being drafted.

I shall conclude by expressing the wish that this session in New York will confirm the commitment undertaken in Istanbul to mobilizing significant resources to ensure the practicable development of living standards in the towns and villages. I solemnly reiterate the firm will of Senegal to contribute to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in order to ensure secure, viable and sustainable human settlements.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Alfonso Gagliano, Minister of Public Works and Services of Canada.

Mr. Gagliano (Canada) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to represent Canada at this special session of the General Assembly to review progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda since 1996.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Canadian delegation with me today. In the spirit of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, we are pleased to have in our delegation representatives of all Canadian Habitat partners. We believe that the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda requires the full involvement of Canadian partners in human settlements activities.

Canadians are fortunate to be relatively well-housed. They enjoy good access to housing markets and to the financing necessary to home ownership. Housing technology is on the leading edge. Our communities are economically and socially vibrant and increasingly environmentally conscious.

(*spoke in English*)

The Canada report recognizes that most Canadians are well-housed in healthy and supportive communities. However, a number of key challenges remain in the areas of aboriginal housing, rental-housing supply and affordability, and homelessness. Governments are committed to working together to address these issues. Canada is committed to advancing sustainable development and healthy housing practices to reduce energy consumption, to protect occupant health, to ensure quality water and to encourage sustainable community planning and design. Canada will continue to work on both the domestic and

international fronts to meet its sustainable development commitments.

C nada prides itself on having an inclusive society, one that encourages civic engagement and public participation. Just as a strong economy allows us to pursue our social values, an inclusive society is a prerequisite to a strong economy. Through our progressive tax system, active measures and social safety net, Canada has been able to limit the social and economic costs of social exclusion. Most Canadian families have benefited from rising incomes and greater economic freedom. However, there are still many challenges we must face, including addressing poverty and removing the barriers to full participation in society for those at risk of being left behind. This is particularly important for our children.

The promotion of gender equality is a fundamental element of sustainable human settlement development. Through domestic and international activities, Canada will continue to promote the empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in all spheres of society.

In recent years, Canada has substantially increased the collaboration and coordination of Canadian partners working in international cooperation and development. Canada's support for international cooperation is exemplified by commitments on world poverty issues and support provided to economic development and local capacity development. We have been working increasingly in partnership with both developing countries and countries in transition. We also support greater collaboration and coherence in all our international cooperation activities.

(*spoke in French*)

With the issuing of the Canadian International Development Agency's document entitled "Social development priorities: an action framework", Canada will be concentrating greater effort on health and nutrition, basic education, HIV/AIDS and child protection. Other Canadian development assistance priorities include basic human needs, gender equality, protection of the environment, human rights and governance, private sector development and infrastructure services.

While our country faces a number of challenges, we can be proud of the progress made since 1996. In closing, I would like to add that Canada remains committed to the goals and principles of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President. I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Claude Bartolone, Minister for the Cities, of France.

Mr. Bartolone (France) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the French delegation, I first wish to underscore that I fully subscribe to the terms of the statement delivered yesterday by the Swedish representative on behalf of the European Union. This convergence of views is not surprising, since in Europe we are all unwaveringly loyal to the Istanbul message. After Habitat II no one could ignore that the future of our countries will be played out primarily in the cities, in the North and as well as in the South. But I am not sure that everybody, at all levels of responsibility, has understood this sufficiently.

This is why I, along with many others, fervently hope that this special session will succeed in remobilizing international opinion as to the scope, acuteness and complexity of the challenges still facing all the cities of the world. For that we need a robust final declaration, resolutely political, which extends and amplifies the Istanbul conclusions and is able to have a real impact on world opinion.

If we are going to overcome the risks attached to the tide of urbanization and seize the opportunities it offers, we must do everything possible to implement the global plan of action adopted in Istanbul as swiftly as possible.

We are assembled here to take first stock of the progress achieved and the difficulties remaining. Let us do this clear-sightedly and without complacency. It is obvious that much remains to be done. Even if we must act quickly, implementing the Habitat Agenda requires a long period of time.

In France, the Government to which I belong and the local authorities have resolutely embarked on the course set in Istanbul. Since 1996, major reforms have profoundly modernized our habitat and urban policy. The fight against exclusion and the exercise of the right to housing have received fresh impetus. The institutional framework for local authorities was considerably reformed to adapt it to the development of cities. New tools for urban planning were introduced, better coordinating sectoral policies and taking better account of local realities and expectations.

The basic goals of social and territorial solidarity, urban diversity, sustainable development and good governance inspire all government action from now on. Thus, the resources devoted to rehabilitating struggling neighbourhoods and socially reintegrating their inhabitants have been greatly increased, so that those men and women benefit, like the rest of the French population, from the return to economic growth.

More generally, fresh impetus has been given to the idea of contract between the State, the territorial authorities and their civil society partners, with a view to combining their respective efforts behind joint projects aimed at both social solidarity and local development. Measures have also been taken to increase the local residents' participation in decisions that concern them and to ensure that the city once again becomes what it should never have stopped being: a favoured place for democracy and citizenship.

As is evident, France has rallied strongly behind the two main themes of the Istanbul summit: adequate shelter for all, and the sustainable development of human settlements.

The French Government believes that the public authorities have a decisive role to play. Whatever its merits, the market alone cannot make a city economically efficient, ecologically prudent and socially harmonious, any more than it can provide access to decent housing and acceptable services to all. Public intervention is vital to regulate markets, to lend support to families with the most modest incomes and to ensure a controlled collective approach to the development of every city. The quality of urban organization and management implies resolute action by public authorities at the local level, but also at the national level.

For us, the city must henceforth be viewed as a primary target for collective action and as a genuine issue for government.

We are therefore particularly interested in a successful outcome to the proceedings of this special session. Of course we do not want it to afford anyone the slightest opportunity to renege on the commitments undertaken in Istanbul. We also hope that it will promote decentralization and will strengthen the capacities of local government, in accordance with the legal framework of each State. We expect a great deal from the consultations among national delegations, the representatives of associations of local officials, non-governmental organizations and other partners of the Habitat Agenda. We hope that the thematic dialogues that exemplify partnership action will be one of the session's highlights.

Finally, we also hope that this session will result in a stronger involvement on the part of all international organizations, especially the competent United Nations agencies, in implementing the global plan of action adopted in Istanbul. In particular we must enhance the coordinating and impetus-providing role conferred on the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi.

Finally, I wish to stress the vital contribution that cities can and must make to the broad objectives of sustainable development. It is important in this regard that the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg next year, should explicitly take the human dimension into consideration.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Elyazghi, Minister of National and Regional Development, Town-Planning, Habitat and Environment of Morocco.

Mr. Elyazghi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since the convening of the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the development of human settlements in Morocco and the implementation of the Habitat Agenda have come to be placed in a political context marked by the will of the Moroccan Government to make social development and combating poverty one of its basic priorities. These actions are consistent with the commitment of the Kingdom of Morocco to the implementation of the principles and recommendations adopted in Istanbul in 1996, and measures are now being taken to ensure the full application of those principles and recommendations.

In this context, the Kingdom of Morocco is completing a broad human settlement development programme for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of ill-equipped districts. In addition to these activities, during the period 1998-2001, the Kingdom of Morocco has carried a out pilot project for poverty prevention in urban and suburban areas in three major cities. We expect to extend this project, which was carried out jointly with the United Nations Development Programme, with the technical support of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), to other cities in the Kingdom. Because of its relevance

and success, the pilot project will be formally presented at a meeting of the Thematic Committee.

Thus the Kingdom of Morocco has clearly demonstrated its willingness to become involved in all poverty-prevention measures and plans of action, as advocated by the United Nations system. In this context, the Kingdom of Morocco is organizing, with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the Fourth International Conference on Urban Poverty, to be held in Marrakech from 16 to 19 October 2001.

A national debate on land-use planning has just concluded in Morocco. It was a democratic debate that lasted for one year in which all sectors of Moroccan society participated. The debate ended with the adoption of a draft national charter that confronts the challenges of land planning and urbanization in a forward-looking and consistent way. The first main feature of this charter is the strengthening of regional capacities and the establishment of human settlements within the context of decentralization and good governance. Secondly, the charter deals with the rational management of natural resources and solid and liquid waste, as well as environmental protection — activities for which the Kingdom of Morocco requests enhanced international cooperation, in particular because it will be hosting the World Conference on Climate Change in October 2001 in Marrakech. The third main issue dealt with by the charter is the strengthening of the role of women, civil society and non-governmental organizations through the reform of a range of legislative texts, including those governing associations, the personal status code, and the electoral code, so as to increase the civic involvement of society as a whole.

The Kingdom of Morocco has also committed itself to making good governance an effective tool for managing human settlements and fighting poverty and for preparing it for the requirements of globalization, in particular with a view to the entry into force in 2010 of its free trade agreement with the European Union.

Several new workshops have opened up in this respect. These include the adoption of a new and more transparent text on public tendering; the implementation of the five-year plan for economic and social development for 2000-2004; the preparation of a national land management scheme; the revision of the charter of local communities so as to make elected representatives and citizens more responsible in the management of local affairs; and the revision of the press code, with a view to increasing guarantees of freedom of expression to journalists and ordinary citizens.

I should like to pay tribute to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), and in particular to its Executive Director. I should also like to reaffirm Morocco's support for all initiatives that contribute to strengthening the capabilities of that Centre so as to enable it to bolster the efforts of Governments to implement the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Jacob Nkate, Minister of Land, Housing and the Environment of Botswana.

Mr. Nkate (Botswana): I would like, on behalf of the delegation of Botswana, and on my own behalf, to express my pleasure at participating in this session on Istanbul+5. My delegation is happy to associate itself with the congratulations already extended to the President and members of his team. I am confident that with his immense experience and under his good stewardship, our deliberations will be fruitful.

The implementation of the Habitat Agenda is one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century, especially in view of the fact that the world is faced with ever-increasing rates of urbanization and poverty, a lack of adequate shelter and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The major challenge is to devise ways and means of bettering living conditions in our human settlements in order to improve the quality of life of our people. The Government of the Republic of Botswana is fully committed to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This commitment is demonstrated by the fact that we have incorporated projects related to the Habitat Agenda into our National Development Plan 8, which continues until the year 2003. In this regard, we have carried out a number of projects contained in our National Plan of Action and National Habitat Report. The projects relate to the main issues of shelter, social development, environmental management, economic development, governance and international cooperation.

Two of the most noteworthy accomplishments of Botswana, intended to improve the shelter and human settlement situation in the country, were the adoption of the National Settlement Policy in August 1998 and of the National Policy on Housing in December 1999. The National Policy on Housing contains a number of

projects which are now at various stages of implementation. In formulating this policy, the Government realized that it could not continue to be the sole provider of housing, and we therefore recognized the importance of actively forging partnerships with other stakeholders. The Government now emphasizes facilitation as its major role, while other stakeholders, including the private sector, are becoming involved in the servicing and development of land.

Another new aspect of the policy is the promotion of housing as an instrument for economic empowerment for poor citizens. The very poor families who do not qualify for existing government assistance programmes will now benefit from the Poverty Alleviation and Housing Programme, which is currently undergoing a pilot phase. The objective of this programme is not only to provide such families with basic skills to build their own houses but also to equip them with basic business management skills, create employment and generate income to improve their living standards. The pilot programme is already showing positive signs at its early stage of implementation.

Further, the new National Policy on Housing will extend the Self-Help Housing Programme into the rural areas. This programme has in the past benefited the low-income households in the township areas only.

The National Settlement Policy to which I referred earlier aims at promoting sustainable settlements through the provision of services and infrastructure to the various levels of settlements. The policy recognizes the symbiotic relationship between urban and rural settlements and advocates the promotion of their functional linkages. Issues of employment and job creation are also addressed by the policy. Currently, there are ongoing projects aimed at the implementation of the National Settlement Policy which include the preparation of district settlement strategies and settlement development plans to guide investment and the orderly development of settlements. Future priorities for sustainable human settlement development include the continuous monitoring and assessment of progress made on the implementation of the National Settlement Policy, with a view to identifying the needs for new policy directions. Furthermore, efforts are being made to develop housing and urban indicators as well as settlement profiles for different levels of settlements. This will assist in assessing the impact of different urban development initiatives and informed decision-making.

The Government is also committed to the provision of equal access to land and security of tenure. Botswana has three categories of land — namely, tribal, State and freehold land — in order to meet the different needs of the people of Botswana. Each and every person is free to hold land under any of the three categories. It is important to note that tribal land constitutes 71 per cent of the land in Botswana, and it responds to the needs of the majority of the people. The land under this category is easily accessible to all income groups as it is allocated at no cost to applicants. State land plots are sold at cost-recovery prices, and the Government has introduced direct subsidies to make these plots accessible to low-income households.

The question of gender equality is topical internationally and is one of the issues being addressed in Botswana. To this end, all gender-biased laws are at various stages of revision. A study commissioned by the Government to look at various policy documents on gender and development is a clear example of the Government's intention to design national development programmes that are gender-sensitive. A strategy commonly referred to as the National Gender Programmes (NGP) was launched in 1998. The NGP is a comprehensive statement of the vision, objectives, strategies and actions which Botswana aspires to achieve in the 20 years following NGP's launching.

Environment management is one of Botswana's top priorities. Measures are being taken to, inter alia, reduce pollution of all kinds and ensure the implementation of local environmental plans.

The above endeavours are being carried out within an environment of good governance characterized by the gradual decentralization of some central-Government functions to local authorities and the strengthening of these authorities, so as to enable them to carry out their mandate. Some of the functions include implementation of the district housing programme and physical development planning by District Councils. In spite of the efforts made by the Government in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, there is still a need to build more partnerships with the private sector and the international community, especially in the area of technical assistance. This will go a long way in reducing

implementation problems associated with the critical shortage of skilled manpower Botswana is now facing.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda and urge all concerned to play an active and effective role.

Finally, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Botswana, I am pleased to pledge annually for the next five years the sum of 75,000 pula — which currently translates to approximately $14,000 — to the Habitat Foundation.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Slaheddine Belaid, Minister of Equipment and Housing of Tunisia.

Mr. Belaid (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of Tunisia and its President, His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, I am pleased to express our pride at the holding of this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly to conduct a comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Agenda of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), adopted in Istanbul in June 1996 and aimed at further consolidating the foundations of comprehensive development and well-being for all peoples and at enabling present generations to safeguard the essential and necessary components of a decent life for future generations.

Tunisia has taken part in all the regional and international events that paved the way for this special session. Our sizeable delegation includes experts and Habitat Agenda partners from our Parliament, local authorities, the private sector and associations. We came to New York with a national report that was developed and enthusiastically implemented by all the national actors, including government bodies, non-governmental organizations and individual experts. Based on objective and detailed indicators, the report shows that Tunisia has endeavoured to set up the legal framework and the institutions required for methodical planning for urban development, growing urbanization and the organized utilization of the national territory, as well as to involve municipalities, regional bodies and local bodies in improving the management of human settlements. The goal of these endeavours is to keep abreast of Tunisia's growing urbanization rate, which was 61 per cent in 1994 and 62.8 per cent in 2000.

Tunisia has addressed this phenomenon by taking a number of measures aimed at developing the land, increasing the supply of low-cost plots, providing appropriate mechanisms for careful urban planning and paving the way for urban expansion, on the basis of a master plan to develop the national territory and master plans for developing cities while taking into account the need to preserve fertile farmland. These are mechanisms for implementing one of the themes of the United Nations Conference — "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world".

As outlined in our report, Tunisia was able to develop and implement specific national strategies aimed at promoting fairness and equality. These strategies entail the participation of the citizen and are without gender-based discrimination. They have allowed us to register significant progress, as the number of housing units exceeded the number of households by 13 per cent in 1999, and the percentage of people owning the housing units in which they live has risen as high as 78.2 per cent. In addition, most of our urban settlements and houses are provided with basic services. The access of these settlements and houses to the power grid rose significantly, from 86 per cent in 1994 to 94.6 per cent in 1999. Access to drinkable water was nearly 75.2 per cent in 1999, and access of housing units to the sanitation network in urban communities reached 67.7 per cent during the same period.

We share the view of the international community that the sustainable balanced development of cities and urban communities can be achieved only through programmes aimed at eradicating poverty, assisting low-income groups and striving to improve the living conditions of all citizens in rural areas. We note that in Tunisia the poverty rate has declined sharply — from 6.2 per cent in 1995 to 4.2 per cent in 2000.

To this end, in his October 1999 Agenda for the future, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali decided to eradicate by 2004 all remaining dilapidated houses; these account for 1.2 per cent of the overall housing stock. Thus, Tunisia will have succeeded in attaining the first goal set by this Conference — namely, adequate shelter for all.

We hope that the debate on assessing the implementation of the Habitat Agenda will result in unified concepts and a deeper understanding of the link between an international strategy and various national

strategies. The correlation between the issues posed by increasing urbanization, within the context of rapid globalization of the economy, and the need to meet the requirements of citizens, has in most cases conferred upon it an international character; hence, the Tunisian President's initiative calling for a world solidarity fund, the basic function of which would be to provide the international community with a mechanism to eradicate poverty and to promote the world's least favoured regions, which would be funded through donations and voluntary contributions. This call was founded on the President's personal conviction that it is no longer possible to imagine a balanced or safe world or countries without decent living conditions for all. The initiative is also based on a successful national experience that was started in 1993, providing for the establishment of a national solidarity fund to be set up within a very short period of time, not exceeding seven years. It allowed for the mobilization of 550 million Tunisian dinars benefiting more than 1,450 remote and deprived areas in which more than 200,000 households lived and now benefit from basic services such as roads, drinking water, electricity, as well as income generation, employment and incorporation within the nation's comprehensive development cycle. At the Urban 21 Global Conference held in Berlin in early July 2000, we highlighted the effectiveness of such tools in anchoring the rural population to their original areas and in limiting rural to urban migration. This experience can be expanded to many other countries worldwide. The interest in the projects of the National Solidarity Fund manifested by visitors to Tunisia from friendly and sisterly nations and their wish to benefit from this pioneer programme has encouraged President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to decide to make Tunisia's experience available to the international community in its efforts to advance humankind and to raise living standards.

Tunisia wishes to hail all those who have contributed to the organization of this important international event and calls on the international community, including Governments, organizations and associations, to show increased solidarity and mutual assistance. Tunisia reaffirms its constant readiness to take part in all international, regional, and bilateral efforts aimed at the implementation of human rights slogans for decent living conditions.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. László Miklós, Minister of the Environment of Slovakia.

Mr. Miklós (Slovakia): First of all, Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you on your election as President of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Slovakia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. Nonetheless, I would also like to make a statement at the national level.

Slovakia's main features as concerns housing issues are similar to those of other Central European countries with economies in transition since 1989. These are as follows: the increasing share of private ownership of dwellings; the increased social segregation of inhabitants; conflicts between the social and economic situation and market prices of dwellings; problems with social dwellings, in particular for the Roma population and unemployed persons; the increasing rate of an aged population; and a low birth r. .e. To solve this situation, the Slovak Government is considering housing as its priority programme for the period 1998 to 2002. Last year this effort resulted in stopping the decrease in housing construction and in doubling the number of completed dwellings compared to that of 1995.

Recommendations of the country profile, elaborated with the assistance of Habitat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, are helping us to create a sound regulations and subsidy system to address the aforementioned problems. The legislation and regulatory framework for housing is already comparable with that of the European Union. The reform of public administration in Slovakia this year will shift a lot of housing and planning responsibilities to self-government at the regional and local levels. All of this indicates that we are on the right track.

The main specific features influencing the sustainable development of settlements in Slovakia are framed by its location at the very centre of Europe, in the Carpathian mountains, where the main European watershed between the Baltic, North and Black Seas runs. This is the reason for the following developments: big regional development differences -- for example, the Bratislava region achieves about 70 per cent of the average development level of the

European Union; a big share of small settlements — that is, 88 per cent of all settlements have fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, and most of them are spread around remote regions with low population density; a large extent of nature conservation, water and forest protection areas with high biodiversity values, since 41 per cent of Slovakia is forested; and heavy mountain terrain, passes and narrow valleys create environmental and development problems linked with international transport.

Therefore, solving major environmental and development problems, such as sewage systems, water supply and waste management, are very costly and not cost-effective when considered in the usual economic manner. Priority problems do not appear as a function of the number of inhabitants, as usually assessed, so we certainly cannot consider per capita costs as the main criterion for environmental and development investments.

We encourage Governments and international organizations to take into account the country-specific relations between settlement structure, natural and landscape conditions and environmental problems when defining their priorities for investment in sustainable development, in particular when considering the priorities for different assistance and funding schemes.

We in Slovakia are also proud of some of our achievements in the area of settlements, in particular our special planning system.

The Act on physical planning, amended and adopted by the Slovak Parliament in July 2000, has been to a large extent adapted to include the ecological dimension. Under the Act, physical planning is considered to be the major complex horizontal integrating tool for sustainable development, environmental preservation and for the protection of nature and natural resources. It incorporates ecological landscape planning and ecological networks into each planning level, and it constitutes the framework for sectoral plans.

All of this is fully in accordance with chapter 10 of Agenda 21 — which we have already forgotten about a little bit — and with the Habitat Agenda. As a result, we would like to make another recommendation on behalf of the four Visegrad countries: that Governments and international organizations strengthen the position of physical/spatial planning as the major horizontal tool for sustainable development and environmental care, and help to increase the acceptance of physical/spatial planning by other sectors as an integrated framework for spatial organization and development.

All of this is especially important in economies in transition, where increased foreign investment requires more space and more land. Therefore the spatial coordination of sectoral policies is of crucial importance for sustainable development.

In implementation of the Habitat Agenda as well as the National Action Plan, cooperation with neighbouring countries, especially with the Visegrad group, European Union countries and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, is indispensable.

This special session is an opportunity for the international community to assess the work done and to express our political will to continue our efforts to further promote the goals of Habitat II: to ensure adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements.

The Acting President: I should like to remind representatives of the time limit set for interventions at our special session, which is five minutes.

I now give the floor to Mr. Im Chhun Lim, Minister of Territorial Organization, Urbanization and Construction of Cambodia.

Mr. Im Chhun Lim (Cambodia) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia, I have the honour to report to the Assembly on the current housing situation in Cambodia and on the progress made in this area in the spirit of the Istanbul summit, held five years ago.

Cambodia is, above all, a rural country. Less than 15 per cent of population lives in urban areas. However, bearing in mind the annual population growth rate of 2.49 per cent, there is a strong chance that the capital and other urban areas will experience an influx of people from rural areas in the next 10 years. Given this trend, and to avert the risk of an uncontrolled rural exodus, the Royal Government is stressing rural development and the economic development of secondary towns through investment in infrastructure.

Currently there are tens of thousands of squatter families in Phnom Penh, and thousands more in other urban centres. These urban poor are living in deplorable conditions, with very low incomes and inadequate housing and public services. The municipality of Phnom Penh, thanks to a fund set up by the Royal Government and with the technical and financial assistance of the international community, has undertaken a pilot project for the development of poor urban communities and has been able to secure adequate housing for more than 1,000 squatter families.

The problem of housing and human settlement is both a rural and an urban problem. Poverty limits the ability of many Cambodians to improve their living conditions. In rural areas, housing is generally very simple but adequate. The problems relate more to drinking water, flood control, health care and security of land ownership. The lack of physical infrastructure is also an obstacle to new human settlements, and consequently, in terms of the sustainability of human settlements, it is closely linked to the ability to overcome these difficulties.

The Royal Government has already set up a poverty-reduction strategy that is based on a multisectoral development strategy. Its goal is to increase the incomes of people in both rural and urban areas by promoting macroeconomic stability, facilitating the development of the private sector, improving the physical infrastructure, promoting the development of agriculture, enhancing the management of water resources, advancing rural development and promoting good governance.

The management of natural resources focuses on the management of water-related resources in areas such as the provision of drinking water, irrigation and flood prevention. The Government is working on a water policy, which, according to the plan to supply rural areas with water, should give, by the end of the year 2005, a larger percentage of the population access to water that is suitable for consumption — that is, 40 per cent of the rural population versus 29 per cent today.

The new land law, to be adopted by the National Assembly in the coming weeks, and an improved system of land registration will strengthen occupants' security of land tenure.

In order to strengthen partnership — especially local partnership — the Government has promoted several projects aimed at functional decentralization, which involve a decentralized and participatory system of management. Village development committees, composed mainly of women, have been set up in more than 30 per cent of villages and are focusing their attention on the participation and strengthened capacity of men and women, thanks to vocational training, the development of basic community services, food security of households and the creation of employment through entrepreneurial programmes in rural areas. The use of demined land for settlements, achieved through a process of participatory planning, is another example of a decentralizing initiative.

We should also underline the fact that Cambodia is endowed with a very active civil society and a substantial non-governmental organization sector, consisting of more than 800 registered organizations, both national and international. This sector may in the future contribute to a more dynamic partnership, with a view to bringing about an improvement in the area of human settlements.

On the basis of these experiences, Cambodia will be holding local elections on 3 February 2002, when 1,621 districts throughout the country will elect their first decentralized local council.

Concerning international cooperation, I should like to underline those international cooperation projects that aim specifically at settlement in urban areas, including the projects undertaken by the municipality of Phnom Penh for the development of poor urban communities, which are supported by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the United Nations Development Programme and Great Britain's Department for International Development. These projects are already bearing fruit, as they are making a considerable contribution to the implementation of the Government's social policy, thereby improving the human rights situation.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude for the technical and financial assistance we have received in this area, and to express the hope that other sources of funding will be forthcoming from the international community to enable us to put through the Habitat Agenda as it was decided on by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al-Jarallah, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Jarallah (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to convey the greetings of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to extend his best wishes for the success of this conference in reaching positive results that will contribute to continuous progress in the development efforts of all nations.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been and continues to be among the most active countries in all activities of the United Nations and its organizations. This is due to its strong belief in the importance of the United Nations and the role of its organization in unifying world efforts to improve the living standards of all mankind and to stabilize human societies. Due to its commitment, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will continue unhesitatingly its efforts to participate in and support the United Nations and its organizations in achieving their objectives.

In 1996, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul. The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda global plan of action summarized the great achievements of that conference. The Declaration, along with the Habitat Agenda, provided the main guidelines and future directions for a global plan of action and efforts to be undertaken by all countries to ensure adequate shelter for all and to improve living environments in human settlements. The Habitat Agenda global plan of action incorporates a wide range of policies to be adopted by Member States for the alleviation of poverty, protection of the environment, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of future human settlement planning, and supporting all international efforts in related activities.

Today, five years after the Istanbul Declaration and the Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat), we need to again assess progress on the international, regional and national levels.

Allow me to present the most important achievements that the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has realized during the last five years, in accordance with the principles of the Istanbul Declaration, within four main broad areas.

The first concerns the formulation of strategies and plans for promoting sustainable development in human settlements and accelerating the integration between urban and rural areas. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is among the countries that introduced at an early stage the practice of formulating strategies and plans for sustainable development of human settlements. This policy has achieved its objectives of promoting orderly urban settlements and upgrading services in both urban and rural areas.

More recently, it became clear that there is a need for a long-term national spatial development strategy. This strategy was envisioned as a general framework for long-term guidance of human settlement development on the national level. Its objectives are to promote a more spatially balanced population distribution and supporting economic activities and services within the national space without hampering economic efficiency in the use of resources, while reducing rural-to-urban migration and the concentration of population in large cities, and eliminating, as much as possible, interregional disparities in development levels between the Kingdom's provinces.

In formulating this strategy, the main considerations included the necessity to promote sustainable development, protect the environment and promote more equitable distribution of development opportunities and accessibility to services by all citizens in rural and urban areas. This is in addition to enhancing the efficient utilization of natural and human resources in all regions. As we are all aware, these issues are consistent with those addressed by the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat II global plan of action.

At present, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in the process of executing the policies incorporated in this strategy through government and non-governmental organizations. In addition, efforts are currently under way to formulate regional development strategies that are considered to be among the most essential tools in executing the national spatial development strategy.

In its continuous efforts to improve the living environment in human settlements, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in the process of formulating and endorsing a comprehensive strategy for sewage treatment and disposal as well as for solid waste

recycling. It includes policies and action-oriented programmes to develop this vital sector.

During the last five years, efforts of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to improve the living conditions of all citizens have been substantial and continue to accelerate quickly. Towards this objective, the Government's development programmes continue to put great emphasis on the provision of adequate and modern services and utilities to all settlements, urban and rural.

In addition, the Government continues its policies of providing the necessary support to stimulate the participatory role of the private sector in promoting sustainable development of human settlements. This support includes but is not limited to the provision of loans and grants on easy terms for investment purposes. Moreover, the Government continues to accord its utmost care and attention to those who are in need and to vulnerable groups. During the last five years, the Government allocated 36 billion Saudi riyals to citizens in the form of loans and grants for specific activities.

The second area of achievement involves enhancing the role of the private sector so that it may become a more active partner in realizing national developmental goals, in general, and in human settlements development, in particular. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a pioneering role in supporting the private sector. Since the early 1970s, it has been pursuing policies intended to broaden and enhance the role of the private sector.

During the last five years, the Government has continued to provide a conducive environment for the private sector to flourish through direct and indirect financial support so that it can play a more effective role in all aspects of establishing productive activities and providing services. Also during the last five years, the Government has given the private sector a new initiative to enhance public-private participation through the establishment of supreme councils, new commissions, authorities and organizations. These include, but are not limited to, the creation of the Supreme Economic Council with a mandate to draw up essential investment policies and to expedite decisions with respect to essential investment projects. A general organization for the promotion of investment was also established. Its main role is to support national and international private sector initiatives to invest in productive new projects and service-oriented activities and to ensure that their investments are economically sound.

In addition, to diversify the economic base of provinces and to promote the utilization of resources within the context of private sector initiatives, the Government has established a High Commission for Tourism. Its mandate is to establish a long-term plan and policies for the development of tourism and to act as a coordinator between different agencies involved in tourism activities. It is thus expected that tourism will become one of the vital productive sectors of the national economy.

Moreover, new laws were issued to promote and encourage foreign capital investment, including a law to allow and organize the ownership of real estate by foreigners.

These are among the examples of actions taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the last five years.

The third area of achievement lies in the cooperation and commitments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding international agreements and United Nations activities.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was among the countries that signed the Charter of the United Nations. Since then the Kingdom has spared no effort to support all international agreements that aim at the well-being of all mankind. The Government has endorsed most of the United Nations agreements, including, during the last five years, agreements relevant to our meeting, such as those on women's rights and the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, its purposes and principles, commitments and global plan of action.

The fourth area concerns the role of the Government in assisting special groups of society. The provision of social services to all segments of Saudi society has been central to the Kingdom's overall development strategy. Towards this end, the Government considers that provision of social services is an integral part of comprehensive development and that it contributes to national progress. This is mainly because investment in social services helps in the alleviation of poverty, the realization of peace and justice, social cohesion among different segments of the society, increase in productivity, and creation of

productive job opportunities, and it heightens public participation in all activities of society.

The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in full partnership with the private sector, is committed to the creation of gainful and productive job opportunities to all citizens so as to ensure that all have adequate income to support a reasonable living standard. In addition, to ensure that no one is left behind, the Government provides financial support and assistance, occupational training and shelter to those who are in special need and to vulnerable groups such as citizens with physical or mental handicaps and those who are deprived due to social circumstances beyond their control. In addition, the Government provides income assistance and social help to the poor and needy. Moreover, the General Organization for Social Security and the Government Retirement Fund are responsible for providing pension and social security payments to retirees from the public and private sector.

The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also provides special opportunities for youth to develop their personal abilities in a secure environment that encourages them to become good citizens and active participants in their societies.

With respect to women, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports and protects women's rights that ensure dignity and promote women's interests according to the principles of Islamic Shariah. The Government continues to allocate needed funds for the expansion of educational institutions for women and to create a safe, equitable and comprehensive educational environment that helps women excel in their educational achievements. At present, Saudi women are actively participating in the labour force and hold jobs in the private and public sectors. Saudi women and men are jointly participating in the development of human settlements.

The fifth area involves international cooperation and assistance to developing countries and disaster areas. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been and continues to be among the pioneering countries in extending helping hands and assistance to many countries, either directly or through international and regional organizations and institutions. At present, the Kingdom's assistance to countries in need amounts to 5 per cent of its national domestic product. This percentage is considered among the highest provided by all countries in the world community.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia expresses unlimited support to basic issues relevant to international cooperation and continues to participate in and contribute to most international activities. Its programme of financial assistance and grants to more than 70 countries represents a model of international cooperation and partnership.

There is no doubt that what the Palestinian people are suffering in the way of persecution, destruction, murder and terrorizing of the innocent on the part of the occupying Israelis is directly in opposition to the principles of the United Nations and the rules of international law, not to mention the objectives and spirit of Habitat II.

Thus, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls upon all States Members of the United Nations, especially the influential members of the Security Council, to meet their obligation to put an end to Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and to enable that people to attain its legitimate rights and establish an independent State on its own territory, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports the principles, objectives and high values set out in the Habitat Agenda and those to be endorsed at this special session, with the exception of those that run counter to the principles of Islamic law and the legislation of our Kingdom. It hopes that the work of this special session will meet with the greatest success.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abreha Asfeha, Minister of Public Works of Eritrea.

Mr. Asfeha (Eritrea): It is an honour for me to address the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly on behalf of the State of Eritrea. Five years after Istanbul, we are meeting here in New York to review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to renew our commitment to further action and further initiatives to deal with old and new situations.

While my country cannot claim the successful implementation of the twin goals of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, owing to the limited resources at its disposal, considerable efforts are being made to address some of the fundamental issues that are regarded as vital to meeting housing demands and ensuring sustainable human settlements.

To mention but some of these, the land proclamation of 1994 and security of tenure are two important legal measures that have fundamentally changed access to land use and ownership of property in Eritrea.

One of the first important steps in urban housing policy is to take legal and administrative measures to resolve problems related to security of tenure once and for all. The second piece of legislation pertains to the land proclamation, which will presumably be difficult to implement, but which is widely believed to promote growth by making land available for business and residential purposes. But more important, legislative measures have been introduced to ensure unhindered and equitable access to land and property by women, irrespective of their marital status.

The latter reform, which is enshrined in the constitution of the State of Eritrea, is central to the empowerment of women for the sustainable development of the country. These legislative measures and others, including our labour laws, have been introduced on the basis of non-discrimination and are aimed primarily at ensuring uniform geographic development while closing the social and economic gaps relating to gender, age group, social status and disability.

Lately, my Government, in partnership with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), has been able to launch a low-cost housing development programme by involving the low-income community and enabling it to participate in the construction of their own shelter using local materials. So that such programmes may expand and be sustainable, my Government is attempting to create a conducive environment that will promote active participation by the private sector and all other stakeholders, especially by residents, which can be instrumental in combating and alleviating poverty.

To narrow the gap in access to social services between rural and urban centres, my Government has been actively engaged in the construction of physical and social infrastructures even in the remotest areas of the country. That modest but important step towards responding adequately to the need for housing and other social services is taking place against the backdrop of the legacy of occupation, conflict and invasion that have had an adverse impact on the development of the country. The border conflict between my country and Ethiopia over the past three years, which has affected about 1.6 million people, has created various categories of victims: internally displaced persons, voluntary refugee returnees, and expellees, with each group demanding a specific response to its needs.

Moreover, the interplay between war and drought in certain regions of the country is pushing the social safety net and government resources to their limit. In that regard, my delegation is particularly grateful for the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons and refugees in the present draft declaration, which I believe will be adopted by the Assembly.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Let me share our experience with regard to the importance of urban governance, a topic that is addressed in the report of the Executive Director of Habitat, to which my Government fully subscribes. The principles and goals of improved urban governance are aimed at creating a close relationship between decision-making bodies and the executing local authorities. While Eritrea has adopted decentralization as a policy and has put administrative structures in place, the lack of strong institutional and financial bases is hampering the transfer of administrative capability to local bodies. The strengthening of the institutional framework is therefore vital for the attainment of improved urban governance.

I wish to make some preliminary remarks about the concept of partnership with local authorities. For that concept to be successful, the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations, including through the twinning of cities, should be carried out with full cooperation and coordination between the donor community and the central authority.

Let me seize this moment to renew my Government's strong political commitment to the full implementation of the draft declaration of Istanbul+5.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Guntis Pukitis, State Secretary of the Environment and Regional Development Ministry of Latvia.

Mr. Pukitis (Latvia): First of all I would like to express my country's gratitude to the United Nations

Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), to the Government of the United States of America and to everybody in this Hall who has made this special session possible.

By way of introduction, I would like to stress that Latvia truly appreciates the extensive efforts and the contributions of all its counterparts in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Latvia has made remarkable progress in its transition to a market economy and democracy. Since 1996, stable growth of the economy has been achieved. For instance, last year's gross domestic product growth was 6.6 per cent. Improvement of the legal framework, central and local management and economics has been a consistent priority for the Latvian Government. Alongside this, non-governmental organizations have become stronger, and have an ever-increasing influence on processes of social importance. Priorities set by the Latvian plan of action for Habitat II — the development of a network of inhabited localities, the provision of opportunities for inhabitants to get suitable settlements and the activation of new construction — are being implemented gradually.

Reforms of the housing sector in Latvia were commenced in the 1990s and are being carried out at present in the areas of the privatization process, the restitution of property and the activation of the housing market. The ownership structure of the housing fund has changed significantly. In 1993, about 54 per cent of housing was owned by the State and municipalities and only 46 per cent was private property. In 1999, private property had reached 70 per cent, but public property represented just 30 per cent. At the end of the privatization process, approximately 80 per cent of Latvian housing will be private property and municipalities will maintain only 20 per cent of the housing as rental or social housing.

Municipalities are providing assistance to poor people or people with low incomes through the rental of social apartments and subsidies for services and rent. At the same time, I have to mention that, in 1999, only 4 per cent of all construction work constituted the construction of housing and the greatest bulk of this was financed by inhabitants themselves. There is still space for improvement in the fields of tax advantages and allowances related to housing investment.

The housing crediting programme adopted in June 2000 by the Cabinet of Ministers is an important milestone in the promotion of the mortgage system. The main goals of the programme are the promotion of the development of the housing market, thus giving inhabitants the opportunity to obtain affordable and suitable housing; the activation of the construction industry, thus promoting the growth of the country's economy; the development of the mortgage lending system; and a new instrument of financial market mortgage bonds.

Relevant improvements in different fields of environmental protection in Latvia have been achieved in recent years. More than 55 water supply and sewage system improvement projects have been launched since 1996. Latvian legislation on air pollution has been synchronized with the relevant European Union requirements as well. Waste management is one of the priorities at both the municipal and State levels. In 1998, Latvia adopted a long-term strategy on waste management up to the year 2010.

Since June 1996, Latvia has signed a large number of international agreements on housing, social development, poverty reduction and environmental management. Multilateral programmes initiated by the United Nations, the European Union and the Nordic Council are being carried out at present. The World Bank, the European Investment Bank and other international financial institutions are providing assistance for my country in related matters.

In conclusion, let me express a sincere belief that only through an integrated approach to our human settlement issues at the international, national and local levels we will be able to resolve them and reach our goals.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Erich Stather, Vice-Minister, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Mr. Stather (Germany) (*spoke in French*): Since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul in 1996, the subject of the development of viable human settlements has gained importance in Germany. This is borne out, inter alia, by almost 1,700 communal decisions that have been taken concerning the local implementation of Agenda 21. They reflect a new culture of communication between the administration, the municipal council, citizens, professional associations, trade, industry, initiatives, churches and many others. A widespread belief has evolved that the viable

development of cities is a key element of comprehensive sustainable development, which has become a leitmotiv and political programme since the 1992 Rio Conference.

Cities are an important key to sustainable development, which is why I am particularly pleased that the German delegation includes not only representatives of the Federation and the states, but also a large group of men and women who are mayors and representatives of civil society.

The German country report on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda was discussed last February in the final deliberations of the national committee. The report documents German progress in implementing the decisions taken at Rio and Istanbul. In this context, the national urban planning policy is designed to develop the European city by making it, without any structural disruption, a viable city in a viable urban region.

In Germany, we have largely succeeded in guaranteeing adequate housing to large low-income families, immigrants and the elderly and in continually improving their living conditions. Overall, Germany today enjoys a well-balanced and functioning housing market. The right to housing has been secured in Germany.

In order to address the danger of social tension and polarization in the cities, the current programme to promote urban planning has been supplemented by the "social city" programme. In 2001, the Federation has spent a total of DM850 million to promote the renovation and development of towns, which allows the promotion of urban planning significantly to stimulate not only urban development, but also structural, employment and economic changes.

Germany also contributes to the development of viable human settlements through bilateral development cooperation. At the global level, we support 242 community and urban development projects through our contribution of more than €650 million. German development cooperation supports the participation of non-governmental organizations, including in the private sector, and of organizations of civil society. Communal development cooperation is also playing an important role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. German cities are increasingly becoming the twins of cities in the developing world.

The development of viable human settlements is primarily the task of each community and country. The international community, however, must act with joint responsibility and commit itself to ensuring the future of the world. New forms of international cooperation are necessary. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in Nairobi is playing a lead role in this political process. I am very pleased to note the outstanding job being done by Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, in her capacity as Executive Director of the Centre, in raising the Centre's profile in order that it may play this important role. I also wish explicitly to thank Mr. Klaus Töpfer, who, as the former Executive Director, laid the all-important groundwork.

The Global Conference on the Urban Future, Urban 21, gave us an opportunity to discuss the major problems of cities. More than 4,000 representatives from the worlds of politics, society, economics and sciences came to Berlin in July 2000 to do so. In his opening statement, the Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasized the particular importance of cities to sustainable development in the twenty-first century. The final declaration of Urban 21 is a clear profession of faith favouring autonomous communal administration and urban management. The results of Urban 21 are recognized in the report submitted at this special session of the General Assembly.

In December 1999, Germany was host to the inauguration of the Cities Alliance, a joint project of the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. The Cities Alliance is a promising multilateral initiative, geared towards the exchange of experience, ideas and strategies, and it contributes to improving the efficiency and impact of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Germany supports the initiative with a contribution of $1 million.

The first successful steps to implement the Habitat Agenda at the global level have been taken, as pointed out in the report submitted by the Executive Director. It clearly states the main problems and necessary priorities for solving problems.

Urbanization will continue in the twenty-first century. At the same time, we can see that poverty is increasingly becoming a major urban problem. One and a half billion people live on less than $1 per day, and the majority of them live in urban areas. That is why two challenges must be the focus of this special session of the General Assembly.

First, it is important to strengthen cities as engines of economic development and as places of social integration. Cities must not continue to be the cauldron of the culture of poverty. To the contrary, they must become the ideal framework for overcoming poverty. "Cities without slums" is one of the main international goals of development decided by the Millennium Assembly. If the world becomes, as expected, increasingly urban, where, if not in the cities, would we want to reach our goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015? The programme of action to combat poverty adopted by the federal Government of Germany in April 2001 also envisaged greater support for the rehabilitation of slums and the fight against poverty in cities and towns.

Secondly, we must direct urban development towards a path that is compatible with environmental demands. Cities, with their patterns of production and consumption, must be evaluated to ascertain if they offer their inhabitants healthy living conditions, if their use of natural resources is sustainable and if they contribute to protecting the climate.

Finally, I wish to thank the preparatory committee for its good preparatory work for this special session of the General Assembly. The draft declaration before us is a good basis for concluding this special session of the General Assembly successfully and with a clear political message. We need a clear consensus on the political priorities that will help us implement the international objectives of development.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Karel Havlíček, Deputy Minister for Regional Development of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Havlíček (Czech Republic): My delegation fully shares the views expressed yesterday by the Minister of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. The Czech Republic aligned itself with that statement, and this allows me to confine my statement to a brief characterization of current processes in my country and to a few comments on the Habitat II follow-up.

In the five years that have elapsed since the Istanbul Conference, the Czech Republic has continued the process of substantial changes in the sphere of housing and human settlements. One of the recent milestones in this process has been the adoption of a strategic document known as the Housing Policy Concept in 1999. It traces past developments in the housing sector, identifies main challenges, underlying objectives and prerequisites for their attainment. Some of the goals have already been achieved, including the establishment of the State Housing Development Fund.

These years have also seen major public administration reform in the Czech Republic, including the establishment of 14 new regions with elected representation. Administrative powers are being gradually transferred to these newly created territorial units.

At the Millennium Summit, the heads of the States made a commitment for whose fulfilment we also feel responsible. The commitment says that by the year 2020 a significant improvement is to be achieved in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers, as proposed in the "Cities without slums" initiative. The fulfilment of that commitment will verify Habitat's capability to participate in resolving such a comprehensive issue. Like many other delegations, we feel strongly that the Habitat Agenda should not be renegotiated while the implementation mechanisms remain to be strengthened. Our efforts should therefore be concentrated on the agreed framework of priorities within the Agenda to make it useful and manageable in terms of implementation for all countries.

We will also maintain our interest in assisting in establishing, promoting and supporting municipal and regional networks of a pool of common and easy-to-measure indicators applicable for national reporting. However, this will call for modifications of the existing indicators.

In the course of implementing the Habitat Agenda, it is almost impossible to overstate the importance of regional, national and local approaches. For our region, Europe, let me mention the ministerial meeting held last September in Geneva within the framework of the sixty-first session of the Committee on Human Settlements of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. That meeting adopted a strategy for a sustainable quality of life in human settlements in the twenty-first century. As does Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of Habitat, we see this document and the ministerial declaration that was adopted as good starting points for the future focus of the work of the Committee, as well as an important step for the future implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe and its contribution to the global process.

We are well aware that the goals set by the Habitat Agenda may accelerate the housing policy reforms enacted by many countries and, at the same time, intensify regional and worldwide cooperation. The Czech Republic, too, is working hard in a bid to gradually achieve those goals. We will also support the efforts to implement those goals by continuing our voluntary annual contributions for the activities of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Oleksandr Shlapak, Vice-Minister for Economy of Ukraine.

Mr. Shlapak (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me to speak, on behalf of Ukraine, at this special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. I should like to take this opportunity first of all to thank all those who took part in the preparatory process for the session for their work and to the secretariat of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) for its substantive report and practical recommendations.

Given the broad range and multifaceted nature of the issues raised here, I would like just to touch upon a few aspects that our delegation believes deserve particular attention. Ukraine's report to the twenty-fifth special session contains detailed information about our national experience of human settlements, and that document is available at the side of the Hall. We are making a difficult transition to a market economy and all of our economic relationships are changing radically. In this context, Ukraine is adopting decisive measures to deal with the housing situation in an attempt to find a comprehensive solution to those problems. The President and the Government of Ukraine are committed to fulfilling the obligations undertaken in Istanbul, with the involvement of local self-government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in achieving the goals set forth in the Habitat Agenda.

Over the past few years, important legislation has been adopted and standards set in this area. We attach particular significance to the concept of sustainable human settlements development, which provides a national plan of action to deal with the crisis of cities and promote their economic growth, create an adequate living environment, address housing problems and overcome poverty and unemployment.

In 2000, a general land-planning scheme was developed, which includes a national strategy and State priorities for the rational use of State-owned land, keeping in mind social and economic features, environmental constraints, resource potential and regional differences.

Housing financing and construction is being promoted, using a mix of owner and State funds, as is the provision of housing to socially vulnerable groups. A State fund has been established to assist young people in building houses. We are ensuring that citizens can exercise the right to obtain plots of land, free of charge and as their private property, on which they can build houses and agricultura' structures. The housing and communal services sector is being reformed, the quality of services is being improved and their cost reduced; subsidies are being provided for the socially vulnerable citizens. Special attention is being paid to the protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage, including its monuments and the historic sections of its towns and cities.

The last decade of the previous century and the beginning of the new millennium have been characterized by the accelerated process of globalization, which is having a significant effect on the development of human settlements. Globalization brings with it challenges and risks — degradation in the demographic situation in cities and other settled areas, an increase in crime and unemployment, overpopulation in cities and the associated housing and ecological problems, poverty, and the negative effects of natural and manmade disasters. The importance of these problems for countries with transitional economies was reaffirmed yesterday by the Secretary-General. It would be appropriate for future work on the Habitat Agenda to pay particular attention to the specifics of these processes in various regions and countries. It is important that the urbanization of the world does not lead to further marginalization.

Ukraine welcomes the increased activities on the part of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the strengthening of its coordinating functions. We would like to draw attention to the proposal of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Human Settlements, in the framework of the implementation of the draft

declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, to support countries with economies in transition by helping them to decentralize management of their urban and rural human settlements and attracting the resources of financial institutions and the United Nations, national and international funds, the private sector and other partners.

The Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements has pointed out that urbanization is a global process that requires adequate global measures. We are convinced that the special session, and the declaration that it adopts, will provide a powerful impetus for the further development of international cooperation in solving the fundamental problem of providing adequate living conditions for all in the coming millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Taloa, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Public Works and Urban Development of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Taloa (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great honour for me to participate, on behalf of the Republic of Yemen, in this special session of the General Assembly devoted to a comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of progress made since the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). I would like to congratulate the President of the Assembly and members of the Bureau for convening this special session.

It has become clear over the past five years, after the achievements of the Istanbul Conference, that issues relating to habitat are among the main challenges facing the international community in the twenty-first century and the new millennium. Thus it is important to formulate a global policy to implement the Habitat Agenda in a manner that can effect real change in the lives of people in urban and rural areas throughout the world.

The population of the world has reached 6 billion, half of whom live on less than $2 a day. Most of those who live in abject poverty are in the countries of Asia and Africa. Many such people live below the poverty level on the outskirts of cities and in slums. In developing countries slum-dwellers represent a third of the urban population. They are deprived of basic services, lack security and communication with domestic and international communities and are exposed to environmental pollution.

In this context, my delegation, as part of seeking solutions to put an end to this worrisome phenomenon, supports the cooperation of the World Bank and the United Nations system in their joint efforts to confront this challenge through establishing a global partnership between cities and development partners based on what was decided in December 1999 through the ambitious plan of action that goes by the name "Cities without slums".

The other half of the population of the world lives in rural settlements and in the countries of Asia and Africa. They represent the majority of the population. Most of them live outside the bounds of comprehensive urban planning and lack all forms of social and health-care services. In order to improve their daily lives, we must mobilize the will of the international community to implement ideas and programmes aimed at establishing social, economic and environmental connection between rural and urban areas. International cooperation in these fields is a matter of the greatest importance. We must encourage the establishment of partnerships between the private and public sectors in a manner that safeguards a comprehensive approach to eradicating poverty and to promoting the sustainable development of human settlements.

The Republic of Yemen has made great efforts to bring about sustainable and comprehensive development. Because of the required large investments in infrastructure — particularly in the social service sector and also in the economic sector — human settlement issues are occupying a good deal of the attention of the Government of Yemen. The Government is making extensive efforts to solve the problems facing the population and to meet the various requirements in rural and urban areas. Special efforts have been made on issues of social cohesion and on subsidies for the deprived and vulnerable segments of the society — this through a strategy and general implementation plan that includes the establishment of a social safety net and organizing and planning land use, as well as other projects. We are trying to solidify our commitment to the exercise of democratic freedoms and the protection of human rights. In order to give women the rights they have been ensured under the Constitution, a female Minister of Human Rights has been appointed for the first time in a unified Yemen. Many areas in the political, economic and

social spheres of the Republic of Yemen have been opened to the active participation of women. Last year the local government act was passed. Its goal is decentralization. People in different administrative districts have exercised the rights guaranteed them under the Constitution to elect representatives in different parts and provinces of the Republic.

We would like to remind the international community at this very important forum of the constraints that the Republic of Yemen is facing due to the flow of refugees from some neighbouring African countries as a result of internal conflicts. This flow has been going on for a long time and our country is working actively to find solutions to these conflicts. The flow of refugees has led to problems in the areas of housing and social services and health care for these refugees. We appeal to the international community for an increase in assistance from all the relevant branches of the United Nations system and from donor States.

As the international community continues its extensive efforts to implement the Habitat Agenda to improve living standards in human settlements and environmental conservation and to establish security, justice and equality among the world's peoples, Israeli occupation forces are forcibly attacking Palestinian cities and demolishing the houses of civilians. Land confiscation and the building of Israeli settlements on Palestinian soil still continues despite the two Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980), which affirmed the illegality of establishing settlement policies. At the moment the report of the Mitchell Committee has called for a freeze on the building of settlements.

Therefore the Republic of Yemen calls on the international community to recognize the importance of maintaining the legal and demographic character of Palestinian land and of preserving its natural resources and the cultural and historic characteristics of the areas under Israeli occupation. We affirm the illegality of forcibly removing people from lands under Israeli occupation. Such action contravenes international humanitarian law. None of these acts contribute to the finding of just solutions to the Palestinian question and Middle East peace to which we all aspire.

In conclusion, we hope that the work of this United Nations special session on Habitat will be fully successful in helping to realize the desired objectives and in improving the living conditions of our populations, the protection of the environment, the eradication of poverty and the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jargalsaikhany Enkhsaikhan, Chairman of the delegation of Mongolia.

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia): As has been mentioned by some previous speakers in this debate, about 3 billion people — that is, half of the population of the world — live in urban areas today, and the urban-based economies are now contributing substantially to the gross domestic product of most countries. Rapid urbanization, the concentration of the urban population in large cities and the rapid growth of megacities are among the most significant trends in human settlements.

The concentration of population in urban areas has its positive and negative aspects. Although cities are engines of growth and crossroads of ideas — places of great intellectual ferment and innovation — these same cities can also be places of exploitation, disease, violent crime, unemployment and extreme poverty. In addition, in many countries the situation is further aggravated by political and economic instability, as well as by natural disasters which result in large numbers of people becoming displaced and forced to live in inadequate shelters.

That is why the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held five years ago in Istanbul, concluded that, with proper guidance, the process of urbanization could promote development. Therefore, I believe that this special session to review the Habitat Agenda should not only focus on actions taken at the local and international levels during the past five years; it should also address the ways and means of generating the new and additional financial resources needed to implement its provisions. In this regard, my delegation attaches great importance to the preparation and holding of the International Conference on Financing for Development to be held next year in Mexico.

As is seen from the report and this debate, many countries, including my own, have made progress towards fulfilling their commitments with respect to the Habitat Agenda. However, it is also quite evident that there is a need to further develop cooperation at the local, national and international levels and to strengthen and make more effective the United Nations

Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) as the focal point for the implementation of the Agenda. In this regard, I would like to underline that the question of providing adequate and predictable funding for Habitat is one of the pressing issues of revitalizing, reforming and strengthening the Centre.

When drawing up further measures, we should bear in mind that the population growth expected in the near future will be mainly in urban areas, and most of it will be in the world's poorest countries.

Allow me now to turn briefly to the situation in my own country, Mongolia. Today about 60 per cent of the country's population live in urban areas. With democracy and open markets, our society is developing rapidly. Today one of the side-effects of the reforms is the widening gap between rural and urban areas, between people with the skills and the knowledge to grasp opportunity and those who lack them. While urban poverty is mostly characterized by low income as a result of production decline, increased unemployment and inflation, rural poverty is prevalent among cattle-breeders who lack access to productive assets, including livestock. Poverty is also related to an underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of market-relations skills and limited access to markets.

Poverty in Mongolia is magnified by the harsh climate. On average, a third of the household or institutional budget is spent just on heating and shelter so as to survive the cold or to stay warm. Thus, nearly 20 per cent of Mongolia's population of 2.4 million were directly affected by a natural disaster, the "dzud", over the last two years in a row. Many people were forced to migrate to the capital, where every third person is already living. As a result, the number of homeless is growing.

My delegation shares the view that future investments should be directed at the cost-effective development of infrastructure and services, especially for such landlocked countries as Mongolia, with its vast territory and small population. The Millennium Road Project, which was launched a few months ago in Mongolia, will promote the socio-economic development of the country by linking all of its five economic regions and by enabling the rural population to have more access to transportation and services. As a result, large settlements would be established along existing and new roads, as well as other infrastructural facilities.

It is rightly pointed out in the report that good governance is essential to addressing the challenges of urban poverty and environmental degradation and to making use of the opportunities offered by globalization. In this connection, I would like to inform the Assembly that the Government of Mongolia is implementing the Good Governance for Human Security Policy Programme, which covers all issues pertaining to human security.

Finally, we believe that this special session provides us with an opportunity to review our achievements, identify the challenges that lie ahead and develop forward-looking strategies for realizing the twin goals: adequate shelter for all, and sustainable human settlements development in our urbanizing world. Let us make the best use of this opportunity.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergio Vento, Chairman of the delegation of Italy.

Mr. Vento (Italy): Italy fully supports the statement made by Sweden in its capacity as President of the European Union.

Italy was a strong supporter of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul (Habitat II) in 1996, when it held the European Union Presidency. Our support for the Habitat Agenda remains undiminished today, as we meet five years later to review the implementation of its objectives. Our ongoing support is most clearly manifested by the large delegation sent here by the Foreign Ministry's Department for Development Cooperation, including its Deputy Director General, as well as many representatives of the Ministry of Public Works, civil society and local authorities. Indeed, our 1948 Constitution already embraces the goals of sustainable urban development in its reference to the right "to enjoy the cultural heritage and the landscape".

The structure of Italy in both topographical and administrative terms is a model of decentralization. This feature makes it an excellent test case for the innovative measures that the Habitat Agenda prescribes to tackle the problems of rapid urbanization. Traditionally, the majority of the Italian population has lived in cities and towns. Our urban population is concentrated in a network of vibrant small and medium-sized centres. This arrangement gives rise to a strong social and economic system that provides for a relatively high standard of living, taking into

consideration, of course, long-standing regional disparities.

Among the matters that Italian municipalities are entitled to deal with autonomously, under the leadership of democratically elected mayors, are several that pertain to local development, particularly the development of the territory. This means that urban and local sustainability policies tend to be drafted at the local level. This decentralized system is what enabled Italy to find solutions to one of the great historic issues: the need for housing and basic services in the post-war period.

In order to promote transparent, responsible, accountable, just, effective and efficient governance of towns and cities, more complex policies based on an integrated rather than a sectoral approach should be implemented at various levels. In the 1990s, Italy experienced deep economic and demographic changes, which included a freeze in our population growth, a birth rate below the European average and a growing percentage of elderly persons. On the plus side, there was a rise in the general standard of living. However, like several other industrialized countries, there has not been a corresponding decrease in the number of people living in poverty.

These demographic and economic trends are reflected in patterns of urban change, since cities tend to change through renewal and revitalization, rather than through expansion. Our historic centres have already been extensively restored, and new developments are primarily in brownfield sites. In the five years since the Istanbul Conference, there has been greater support for programmes to revitalize peripheral areas and rich experience in the area of urban regeneration policies. This is producing more liveable areas in our cities.

Access to affordable housing is one of the chief issues addressed by our legislation. During the last few years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of immigrant workers — the rate is now 2.2 per cent of the total population — and the traditional local wardens of housing policy have been hard put to handle this unexpected structural phenomenon. In fact, approximately 40 per cent of immigrants live in precarious accommodations.

The picture for the environment is mixed. Despite some emissions reductions, not all the changes hoped for in consumption and production patterns have become a reality. Petrol consumption has doubled in 10 years, and the percentage of private cars on urban roadways has increased by one third. Upgrading of our extensive rail system, including freight, is moving too slowly. The consumption of potable water is expected to grow consistently, although in a few areas there are still periodic water shortages, and there is still room to improve the necessary filtration facilities.

Finally, Italy has experienced several hydro-geological disasters — possibly due to climate change — which have led to a greater awareness of the insufficiency of a strictly local approach to development and of the need for more efficient coordination with national policies.

Let me not neglect some of our major accomplishments: for the first time, we achieved the goal of preserving at least 10 per cent of the national territory through the establishment of natural parks and reserves. Recent actions have sought to harmonize the goals of sustainability, local development and urban renewal. In the spirit of the Habitat Agenda, such programmes are aimed at enhancing the capacity of local communities to cope with future challenges through investments in structural improvements or human development. In this light, investing in the empowerment of women, children, and the elderly does not represent a social cost, but rather, a contribution to the overall quality of life.

There are limits on the progress that can be made through strictly local action. For example, poverty, immigration and environmental hazards are global challenges that should be addressed through cooperative efforts between every level of Government, from local administrations to international institutions.

As for international cooperation, Italy would like to confirm its commitment to increasing the percentage of our budget that is dedicated to programmes that implement the Habitat Agenda. Our renewed development cooperation policy gives priority to poverty eradication programmes that seek to provide basic infrastructures and access to safe drinking water, create new urban services, upgrade informal settlements and stimulate capacity- and institution-building.

Our development cooperation policies are tending more and more to follow the empowerment and enablement strategies recommended by the Habitat

Agenda. In concrete terms, this means giving more importance to activities that support local organizations in the definition of their urban strategies through capacity- and institution-building initiatives.

Some of our most recent programmes address the preservation and revitalization of our cultural heritage, particularly in connection with areas of poverty. In 1999 Florence hosted a World Bank Conference — "Culture Counts" — whose focus was that the loss of culture and identity has damaging effects, both natural and man-made, whose toll is ultimately much higher than the short-term costs.

The goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlement development are crucial both to economic, social and cultural development and to environmental protection. That is why we support the Habitat Agenda actions to promote peace and justice and to prevent natural and man-made disasters. In this light, we stress the importance of strengthening coordination within the United Nations system, and we recognize the specific, reinforced role of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. To this end, I am pleased to announce that just yesterday the Italian authorities approved a substantial increase in our voluntary contribution to the Centre.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Mr. Yashar Aliyev, Acting Chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): Today the world is at a crucial stage of its development. The ongoing process of globalization is accompanied by the increasing pace of urbanization. For the first time in the history of humanity, the larger portion of the world's population will be living in cities. Meanwhile, there are about 100 million homeless and 1 billion people living in substandard conditions. Unfortunately, these figures are increasing.

Obviously, the main responsibility for addressing the challenges of urbanization rests with national Governments. At the same time, without significant technical, financial and other kinds of assistance from the developed countries and the relevant international institutions, the developing countries and economies in transition will not be in a position to deal effectively with the emerging large-scale problems caused by urbanization.

The creation of appropriate living conditions for the population is a priority task for the Government of my country. It is implementing vigorously the Istanbul Agenda and is doing its best to engage representatives of the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society in this process. In its implementation of the Habitat Agenda, my Government is conducting democratic and economic reforms, carrying out measures to eradicate poverty, and rendering support to low-income families and other vulnerable social groups.

Unfortunately, the processes of democratization and economic reform in Azerbaijan are hampered by the ongoing military aggression by the Republic of Armenia against my country, which has resulted in the occupation of 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan. For more than 10 years, the Nakhichevan region of Azerbaijan has been blockaded by Armenia.

Armenia's aggression has led to the destruction of centuries-old cities and settlements. In the occupied territories, more than 900 cities and towns, some 600 schools, 250 medical institutions, and all museums and historical and cultural monuments have been destroyed. About 1 million Azerbaijanis — or one in eight citizens of the country — have lost their homes. This is the ninth year in which they have been living in tents, in unbearable conditions.

After the Istanbul Conference, the Government of Azerbaijan established the Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the Liberated Territories, which carries out its activities in accordance with the guidelines of the Habitat Agenda. Since 1997 the Agency has restored 2,145 houses and infrastructure facilities in four administrative regions of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation.

The adoption of the law on the basics of town planning in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1999 has laid the necessary legal foundation for activities in this area. New, up-to-date environmental laws have also been adopted, namely, on environmental protection, environmental security, sanitary and epidemiological safety, and other areas. With the adoption of the law on the status of municipalities in 1999, the process of decentralization and transfer of power from the central Government to the local authorities has begun.

It goes without saying that a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of national programmes of action and of the Habitat

Agenda is comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the world. Armed conflicts, State terrorism, foreign aggression and occupation, which have disastrous consequences for human settlements, should not be only opposed by each and every State, but must be decisively suppressed by the international community.

The implementation of the Habitat Agenda is an integral part of the poverty eradication process and of sustainable development. Our delegation is certain that the Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, which we are about to adopt, will contribute to the sustainable development of cities, and work in this field will be actively pursued at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg next year.

In conclusion, I would like to express our delegation's confidence that the concerted efforts by all countries to implement the Habitat Agenda will allow us to cope with the challenges of the new millennium and to create a stable and safe common home on our planet.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairperson of the delegation of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Let me congratulate Mr. Holkeri on his election to the presidency of this special session to review and evaluate Habitat II, and may I express my belief that his experience and skill will greatly contribute to the success of this important event.

Only 10 years ago, newly independent States appeared on the map of the world upon the ruins of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Each one of them has chosen its own path to development and is striving to create a way of life in accordance with its national values and ideals. This was internationally recognized by the United Nations declaration of the year 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

The consequences of urbanization are different for each particular country, and Turkmenistan, following up on Habitat II, has identified the policy of improvement of housing in the cities as a priority.

We came to independence with high rates of mortality and disease and a low level of health care. While we had vast natural resources, we did not have industrial infrastructure, and we were in a state of complete food dependency. Housing problems were acute.

Turkmenistan's process of sustainable development started with the creation of a sound legal system and the protection of citizens' rights and liberties secured in our Constitution. Turkmenistan's commitments in this connection were set out in its special declaration on the international commitments of neutral Turkmenistan in the sphere of human rights and in many legislative acts.

The dynamic development of the economy has made it possible to make changes in all spheres of life. New branches of industry were created — textile, oil and gas, food — and this has allowed us to provide food security for our people and to strengthen the energy capacity of the country.

The protection of the interests of the people is the focus for the President of Turkmenistan, who has adopted special programmes for these purposes. In accordance with the strategy for socio-economic change in Turkmenistan for the period until 2010, 46 per cent of the national budget will be devoted to social needs. Education and medical care are provided free of charge. Thanks to the measures initiated by the head of State, the people of Turkmenistan enjoy many benefits. They receive free gas, water, electricity and salt; there is a low, fixed price for flour; and nominal amounts are charged for public utility services. This huge social support for the population has safeguarded our country against social upheavals during this transition period and has ensured a stable development of the economy. There is intensive development of human settlements; high-quality residential housing is being built, as well as social and cultural complexes; water, gas, electricity, road and highway facilities are being reconstructed or newly built; and trees and gardens are being planted in areas where conditions are extremely hot and dry. The full gasification of the country was completed, and this allows the population to use ecologically clean fuel for everyday activities.

A study of the standard of living conducted by the Government of Turkmenistan in cooperation with an American research institute demonstrated a high level of housing. Of people living in rural settlements, 97 per cent have separate flats or houses; in the cities the figure is 96 per cent. This has been made possible by the housing legislation, the provision of State loans for construction of housing, transferring land,

attracting investments and giving extensive rights to local self-governing bodies.

An enormously positive role has been played by the United Nations Development Programme, with whose assistance a joint programme on the development of public utilities in Turkmenistan has been established.

Among our population, 98 per cent have education, and studies note that the level of education is directly proportional to the level of income and the economic status of households. The gross national product in 2000 grew at a world record rate of 17.6 per cent.

Thanks to the sustainable development of the country, the creation of new employment opportunities and the development of private businesses, the level of unemployment is low, especially in rural areas.

More than half of Turkmenistan's population is made up of women, and in this connection gender policy that ensures their participation in socio-economic processes has a direct influence on the life of the population, which is extremely important. Among women, 98 per cent have education, while among those 41.4 per cent have higher education, and 26 per cent of the members of the Turkmenistan Parliament are women.

Improvements in the demographic situation in the country, in particular the increase in life expectancy, the decrease in mortality for women and children and the increase in working-age population, were made possible by steady economic growth and social and inter-ethnic stability. In this regard, the assistance of the United Nations and its specialized agencies is invaluable.

Our goal is to make Turkmenistan a flourishing country. To achieve this goal we are open to international cooperation, and we again confirm our devotion to the principles set forth in the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Stefan Tafrov, Chairman of the delegation of Bulgaria.

Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria) (*spoke in French*): We have come a long way since Vancouver and the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. The world has changed greatly even during the five years since the 1996 Conference, and the twenty-fifth special session gives us a unique opportunity to seek original and effective solutions, to redefine a strategic initiative and to devise a policy of human settlements capable of remedying the scourges of exclusion, poverty and environmental degradation in cities and villages alike. We must act immediately to respond to the hopes of the people of the world, as well as to their needs and aspirations at the beginning of the third millennium.

The Commission's report sheds light on questions of concern that this session must examine, and it defines clearly the framework for our discussion. Bulgaria welcomes the visionary draft declaration on cities and other human settlements, which follows in the steps of the Millennium Declaration and the Istanbul Habitat Agenda. Bulgaria regards the strengthening of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) as a crucial element for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. More attention should be paid to better coordination among the Centre for Human Settlements and other United Nations bodies — the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the Economic and Social Council — and other partners; the power of their synergy could give a new impetus to the implementation of sustainable development policies.

A global and integrated approach is needed in this new era of globalization and interdependence. Today, all countries, both developed and developing, be they in the North, South, East or West, face similar problems in the field of human settlements. A spirit of cooperation and a common plan are imperative for finding an approach of solidarity that will bring suitable solutions.

In order to carry out the task entrusted to it, this special session must pay particular attention to the problems of poverty, marginalized and vulnerable groups, rural areas and urban misery. Whereas all countries and their peoples encounter the same problems, in many developing countries, especially in rural areas, and for the unemployed, the homeless and slum-dwellers, the situation is particularly desperate.

One particular aspect of this problem that I would like to stress is the exclusion of women, young people and children. We must work more decisively to forge policies and take urgent measures to guarantee full and equal participation for women and young people in the

planning of human settlements and in decision-making in this sphere.

Let me share my profound satisfaction at the participation — both in this session and throughout the preparatory process — of our partners: local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and women's and young people's groups. Civil society has already made its voice heard on the approach to the problems of human settlements and in identifying solutions to those problems.

Bulgaria is convinced that this session must declare that a priority for action is good urban governance at all levels. Public authorities, which bear primary responsibility for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, must create a climate of cooperation among all partners and must encourage their participation in the search for solutions that will make our cities safer, more workable, healthier and fairer. I am pleased to note the support of many Governments for the establishment of mechanisms for consultation and partnership among the parties concerned. Here, the best-practices initiative can promote true exchanges of information and can enable us to learn from one another. An important element of political, institutional and legislative reform is decentralization; it deserves special attention. Decentralization is the first step towards good governance. But decentralization must always go hand in hand with adequate funding.

The Bulgarian delegation understands the need to devote more attention to environmental degradation. New initiatives translated into concrete action and tangible results must be taken to address the urgent, critical challenges in this sphere.

Since the Istanbul summit, the Republic of Bulgaria has been formulating its own national policy and has been working on international cooperation in line with factors related to the specific needs of its economy in transition and to what it sees as essential concerns for its future and that of the region. We have reformulated our national strategy with an awareness of the critical challenges of transforming our economic and social structures to those of a market economy. We have adopted a number of measures, including political, institutional and legislative reforms. We have defined the main lines of a new human-settlements vision: housing, social development, the eradication of poverty, economic development, good governance and regional cooperation. Government activities and programmes related to human settlements have been integrated into our macroeconomic, social and environmental policies.

In the field of housing, the accent has been placed on the preservation of historic sites and of our cultural heritage and on the renovation and modernization of urban sites. Programmes and activities to reform the property-registration system and to improve the registration and administration of real estate are under way, and there are plans to address the question of financing for housing. The Government is promoting measures to support vulnerable individuals, and, in the sphere of environmental management, efforts are being made to regulate and rationally manage resources.

Turning to the question of regional cooperation, I want to highlight the role of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1985. This has become a model for legislation on local self-government for many countries in transition.

There is no doubt that this special session has given rise to great hope that the international community will unite on an operational habitat programme, including specific and effective commitments. Given that hope, and on behalf of the more than 6 million inhabitants of our planet, we must renew our commitments, shoulder our responsibilities, and mobilize our determination and political will to translate the measures we adopt into action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Anund Priyay Neewoor, Chairman of the delegation of Mauritius.

Mr. Neewoor (Mauritius): It is a great pleasure for me to address the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session, devoted to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (Habitat II). Five years have passed since we met in Istanbul to adopt the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. The time is now most appropriate for us to critically assess how successful we have been in the implementation of our decisions and to take stock of the problems we have encountered. The outcome of our deliberations at this session will certainly serve as an important input for the preparation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development to be held in September 2002 at Johannesburg, South Africa.

My delegation fully supports the provisions of the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the recommendations contained therein. We strongly commend Habitat for its efforts to be consistent with the overall goals of the United Nations to alleviate poverty and to promote sustainable development. We also wish to express our appreciation to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for its relentless efforts in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Habitat Agenda using a variety of tools.

We believe that both the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda remain as valid today as they were five years ago. It is therefore opportune for us to reaffirm our will and commitment to continue with their implementation.

Our assessment of the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda is that it has been far from satisfactory. In spite of the articulate and defining presentation of the various issues, implementation has lagged behind. It is to this that we must give serious thought. A number of reasons may be advanced for this; however, we believe that the complexity of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda could have been a major factor. Several national Governments have not been able to undertake the diverse tasks necessary for implementation due to lack of resources.

We all know too well that providing a dwelling to citizens is never an end in itself. In fact, it is the beginning of the urbanization process, a process which cannot be complete without the provision of such essentials as electrification, water supply systems, road infrastructure, waste management and the construction of schools and many other public facilities. These in turn call for substantial investments which, unfortunately, in developing countries, have to come from extremely scarce resources.

Urbanization all over the world is associated with a plethora of problems. Environmental degradation and the challenges of generating sufficient employment, providing adequate housing and meeting the basic needs of the citizens are major issues confronted by urban planners. People living in urban areas expect their national Government to overcome these challenges with a view to fulfilling their legitimate needs for a decent living. Once again, Governments are faced with the problem of inadequate financial resources in meeting the challenges of urbanization.

In Mauritius, there is a growing demand for land for residential purposes. As we are a small island State with limited land area, this growing demand can be met only by releasing land which is being used for agriculture, a major economic activity in the country. One can therefore understand how difficult it is for the Government to strike the proper balance to meet the demand for land for housing without drastically affecting the national revenue from agriculture.

My delegation fully shares the view that local authorities play an important role in the administration of cities. They also have a crucial part to play in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Local Governments are the closest development partners of the citizens. In Mauritius, the national and local Governments have evolved a synergy to carry out development activities.

It is the objective of our Government to provide a decent dwelling to every Mauritian family. The Government continues to lay emphasis on social housing and on giving special assistance to families with low incomes that are making efforts towards finding a shelter for themselves. In order to cater to the different economic strata of society in Mauritius, the Government has established a low-cost housing scheme for the low-income group. Additionally, the Government offers incentives, such as grants and loans with low interest rates, to help citizens in the construction of their houses.

The contribution of the private sector to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda cannot be underscored enough. The cooperation between Government and the private sector is of particular importance in addressing the problem of urbanization and its attendant difficulties. The private sector in Mauritius is actively helping in vertical construction, as well as in facilitating the provision of basic infrastructure and urban services.

This session provides us with the opportunity to reiterate our political will and commitment to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda with the close cooperation of all actors involved. It is our hope that this renewed commitment will contribute to a better world with a decent dwelling for everyone.

Finally, my delegation would like to express its support for the declaration to be adopted at the end of this session.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fotios-Jean Xydas, Chairman of the delegation of Greece.

Mr. Xydas (Greece): Let me begin by adding my delegation's and my personal congratulations to the President of the General Assembly and his colleagues in the Bureau on their respective elections. I am convinced that, given his proven skills and able leadership, this session will be brought to a successful conclusion.

Allow me also to associate my country's position with the statement made by the Presidency of the European Union.

Five years after Habitat II, we have come together again to reconfirm our political will to accomplish the two main goals of the Habitat Agenda. The implementation of the Habitat Agenda is a major challenge for my country and its adoption coincides with a period of dynamic changes in Greece at all levels, which are related to both external and internal factors. The problems we face in our human settlements are of a particular and complicated nature. We should not ignore, for example, that every part of Greek territory bears a many centuries-old cultural heritage which should be preserved and protected.

We in Greece are daily faced with such difficult dilemmas, particularly when development has to take place. It is a fact that important and positive steps have been taken in the past five years concerning all aspects of quality of life in both urban and rural areas. All these and many of the difficulties we face, as well as our future priorities, are contained in our national report prepared for this special session of the General Assembly.

In the housing sector, where, traditionally, the country greatly depends on private initiatives, action of the public sector — Government, local authorities and so on — is based on the provision of tax relief and benefits, interest-rate subsidies for first-time home-buyers and the programmes of the Workers Housing Organization. Our efforts are being intensified to meet the housing needs and social integration of vulnerable social groups, such as repatriated ethnic Greeks from countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as the Roma.

Particular efforts are being made to cope with frequent natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods. These efforts relate both to the rehabilitation of the people affected and the establishment of methods and means to reduce the degree of vulnerability of constructions and the developed environment of human settlements. Furthermore, Greece faces a new challenge from the influx of a considerable number of political and economic refugees. Efforts in this area aim at guaranteeing all necessary means for their social integration, among which housing is a priority. Lastly, special efforts are being made towards improving housing quality in terms of energy performance, structural adequacy, basic infrastructure and community services.

Of particular importance is the balanced development of the national human settlements system, which is characterized by a wide variety of structures, problems and options. This has led to the upgrading and appropriate adjustment of planning and design mechanisms and approaches to address the diversity of human settlements at all levels of national territory, especially in mountainous, rural, island and coastal areas. The completion of the major transportation and communication network that is under way, as well as the national cadastre, are expected to contribute significantly to the balanced development of our settlements.

In the large urban centres and in the medium and small cities, action is focused on the improvement of the quality of the developed environment, mainly through the renewal of deteriorated urban areas, the restoration and reuse of abandoned buildings, the improvement of infrastructure, the control of illegal building, the restriction of unjustified urban space expansions and the protection of peri-urban and non-urban areas. The implementation of the construction programme for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens has already contributed to the radical upgrading of urban infrastructure.

Let me add that Greece strongly believes that policies for the development of rural areas and the improvement of the quality of life in our villages contribute substantially to the full and balanced sustainable development of the whole country. We realize that the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

requires collective efforts and coordination of the actions of stakeholders involved in all sectors of human activities and at all levels of governance. We place particular emphasis on the crucial role of local authorities. Good governance at the local level, which promotes comprehensive approaches, participatory processes and transparency, constitutes the driving force towards sustainable human settlements development. Within this framework, the recent reorganization of municipalities and communes into larger administrative entities, combined with the decentralization of decision-making and the transfer of financial resources, constitutes a major achievement for our country.

Let me add a note concerning the history of Habitat. I am referring to the efforts started 40 years ago by distinguished Greek architects and planners in cooperation with other international personalities in various fields. Conscious of the need for the international community to cope with the eventual and unavoidable phenomenon of global urbanization, and of the need for the adoption of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to human settlements, those individuals tried to upgrade and expand the initial United Nations programme on housing, building and planning into a holistic concept of human settlements, and to demonstrate the necessity of giving priority to natural environment issues and the quality of the total spectrum of human settlements.

Those efforts led to the Vancouver Conference — Habitat I. In recognition of that contribution, a moment of silence at the plenary was devoted to the memory of the late Professor Doxiadis, the first Greek initiator of this effort, a year after his death.

Let me also remind the Assembly that polis, policy and *politismos* — which is culture — are terms derived from the same root in the Greek language. We understand that Habitat is concerned with bringing together the issues dealt with at the United Nations conferences on the environment, population, food, the status of women, the whole balance of the world economic order, and many others. For it is in settlements that the effects of all these particular issues come together. It is in settlements that mankind achieves happiness, justice and dignity — or suffers rejection, despair and deepening violence.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ion Botnaru, Chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Botnaru (Moldova): The five-year process of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda has offered an integrated and balanced approach that encompasses policy and legislative and programme initiatives, towards both the development of human settlements and poverty eradication. Although we have registered some progress in different areas of human settlements, there still remains the challenge of developing and implementing effective strategies and methods to solve acute problems resulting from poverty, urbanization and lack of adequate shelter, including social housing, rapid population growth, economic stagnation and social instability.

The review and appraisal of these obstacles should be conducted at the international, regional and national levels while taking into consideration the commitments of the Habitat Agenda and its critical areas, documenting and learning from the lessons of its implementation, and by preparing recommendations for future action, as indicated in the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and other action-oriented documents of this session.

My country believes that the best way to achieve sustainable human settlements is to ensure that future initiatives are based on best practices and on the experience gained from the review and appraisal process. The principles that are at the foundation of the Habitat Agenda and the Habitat II platform of action must guide us in our work, as those documents continue to constitute a relevant and important global agenda for development in an urbanizing world. Another basic approach to the development of human settlements that embodies the Habitat Agenda could be partnership and capacity-building in the era of globalization and urbanization.

We are fully aware that the growing globalization of the world economy represents opportunities and challenges for the development process, as well as risks and uncertainties. There is therefore a need to identify problems more clearly and to endeavour to find possible improvements, seeking new perspectives on urbanization and wider participation by various active actors in the area of human settlements, including governmental and non-governmental

organizations. In that context, the Government of the Republic of Moldova reaffirms its commitment to the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the final document of this session, as a basis for future action and progress.

By adopting the Habitat Agenda all Governments have agreed to take the steps necessary to ensure that affordable, habitable and accessible housing is provided and that security of tenure is guaranteed. These measures represent the reaffirmation of the right to adequate shelter, that is, a place to live in security, peace and dignity.

During the Istanbul review process, my country has focused on undertaking a whole set of current and long-term measures, on the elaboration of a common policy in this field that provides for the development of normative frameworks, and on the development of national mechanisms to implement the principles of sustainable development, including sustainable human settlements.

The socio-economic reforms in my country are oriented towards a market economy and have led to the establishment of a new concept of urbanism and territory planning. As a result, significant changes have taken place in this sphere during the last five years. Those changes include the decentralization of public administration, the adoption of a new structure of territorial administration, and the consolidation of capacity-building at the local administration level, with a view to optimizing the whole reform process.

Like other countries with economies in transition, we are exerting considerable effort to grapple with fundamental challenges. It is obvious that economic and social problems have been onerous for a certain part of the population, causing a great deficit in the municipal housing sector and threatening the steady development of society. In order to avoid a sharp deterioration in the living standards of the population, a reduction in municipal services, a decline in the efficiency of economic activities and a descent into poverty, we must look for new ways to significantly improve the urban housing sector and municipal infrastructures.

Fully aware of this, the Government of my country, with broad support from civil society and some international agencies, has drawn up a comprehensive national strategy for sustainable development — Moldova 21 — that contains an in-depth analysis of the current situation and identifies the main objectives and orientations for the reform of the whole spectrum of socio-economic activity, including human settlements. The realization of the national cadastral project, which is aimed at creating informational support and the necessary conditions for the development of urban and rural areas, also constitutes an eloquent example of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. At the same time, our approach in the national strategy programme consists of adopting a well-coordinated set of legislation and implementing governmental policies directed at developing sound housing and sustainable human settlements.

A new dimension in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in my country is the active involvement of the private sector and small business in the development of human settlements. In this context, we share the view expressed by the Executive Director of the of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements that the fundamental prerequisite for sustained development of human settlements, adequate housing and environmental protection is a consolidated democracy in which there is pluralistic political representation, rule of law and respect for human rights and civil liberties, and which is supported by sound economic and social reforms and effective local administration. Furthermore, we also take into account the importance of international cooperation, especially cooperation with United Nations specialized agencies.

We believe that the implementation of the Habitat Agenda is possible only if the declarations and political appeals are followed by practical steps and if real financial resources are found. As the primary responsibility for full implementation of the Habitat Agenda and of the additional actions and initiatives contained in the outcome documents of the current special session of the General Assembly lies with Governments, I would like to reaffirm the commitment of my Government to promote the development of sustainable human settlements.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Walter Balzan, Chairman of the delegation of Malta.

Mr. Balzan (Malta): The delegation of Malta aligns itself with the statement made earlier by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

At the outset, may I commend the work carried out by the United Nations Centre for Human

Settlements in channelling the efforts of the international community towards the effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Government of Malta believes that the provision of adequate shelter for all is of significant importance, since it is conducive to socio-economic progress and sustainable development. This delegation views the Habitat Agenda as the necessary template for efforts made by both national authorities and the international community in their efforts to attain sustainable human settlements development.

As we are fully aware that the very high population density in Malta necessitates very careful land-use planning, a structure plan for land-use management was adopted in the early 1990s, and a planning authority was established to monitor its implementation. Through the active participation of relevant major groups, including local authorities, a number of local plans were subsequently drawn up for the various regions.

Initiatives encouraging home ownership were introduced and eventually were implemented throughout the years with considerable success. In fact, today 70 per cent of homes in Malta are owned by their occupants. Moreover, protection against dispossession from property and the deprivation of rights over property is provided for in the Constitution of Malta.

Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case for large parts of the globe. Too many people still live in poverty and in miserable housing conditions, conditions that slow down economic growth and lead to environmental degradation and, in turn, lead to more poverty. This self-perpetuating problem needs to be addressed in an integrated manner. The achievement of this goal, however, necessitates the adequate support of the international community.

In formulating policies for sustainable development in this field, the human dimension should remain at the centre of the development process. Comprehensive planning policies and strategies should not overlook the economic, social and environmental concerns, as these three pillars of sustainable development are not only interdependent but are mutually supportive. Policies designed along these guidelines would effectively contribute to the reduction of poverty and unemployment and the provision of social services, decent housing, crime prevention and better infrastructure, including electricity and safe drinking water, as well as the integration of women and marginalized groups for an improved social fabric.

Governments have the primary responsibility for ensuring sustainable development in their respective countries and for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. However, it must be acknowledged that socio-economic progress in the developing countries cannot be achieved without assistance from developed countries through, inter alia, institutional capacity-building, the promotion of best practices and the achievement of adequate levels of official development assistance, as well as debt relief.

Broad public participation, including by women, in decision-making and policy ownership is critical to the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda. In this respect, the input of local authorities, especially for improved urban governance, cannot be sufficiently underscored. Aware of this, and guided by the principle of subsidiarity, the Government of Malta has extensively amended the Local Councils Act of 1993 with the aim of further strengthening the devolution process.

The further decentralization of community services through the intensification of the one-stop-shopping concept has been high on the Government's agenda. More importantly, local councils, in which residents have a direct bearing on the decision-making process affecting their immediate urban or rural environment, have become an integral and indispensable part of our political system.

This delegation believes that society should provide families with an environment that promotes the potential of the family as the rearing ground of present and future generations. Such a responsible role needs to be complemented by other social institutions and community-based organizations, as well as by the promotion of a high-quality education system that instils life skills rather than merely imparting facts.

This conference presents yet another opportunity to the international community to express its solidarity with those living in poverty and in need of adequate shelter. The problem does not need identification.

The measures required to attain our objectives have been laid down. However, although progress has been achieved, much more needs to be done. Efforts need to be intensified in order to ensure that expressions of solidarity are translated into concrete

action aimed at alleviating the plight of so many millions of human beings.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hussain Shihab, Chairman of the delegation of Maldives.

Mr. Shihab (Maldives): It gives me great pleasure, Sir, to see you preside over this important special session of the General Assembly. I am confident that with your able leadership and diplomatic skill, you will steer the work of this session to a successful conclusion.

Maldives, being a nation of very small islands, had to face the issues of shelter in its own special way. Due to the fragmented nature of the country, with the population distributed over a large number of small islands, provision of infrastructure to small pockets of population in an effective and sustainable manner required new thinking in planning.

At present a very important policy related to human settlements in the Maldives is a new approach to regional planning. For effective provision of various social and physical infrastructure services, a programme on population concentration has been initiated. People living on islands with very small populations are encouraged to move to selected islands with larger land areas and development potential. In the long term, there will be fewer inhabited islands with better facilities, which will attract economically feasible and sustainable investments in infrastructure.

Although moving the population is a difficult process, the Government of Maldives is able to carry out the population concentration programme by involving the public in the decision-making process. The people involved are convinced of the various benefits of this new approach, and the success rate of implementation is very encouraging.

We believe that this new approach to planning is an important step in implementing the Habitat Agenda in our country. We are confident that this long-term strategy will prove to be one effective way of addressing the problem of adequate housing and other shelter-related issues. Another important planning decision taken by the Government is to address the scarcity of land in the capital island of Malé, the biggest urban centre in the country. The shortage of land has resulted in an acute shortage of housing and land needed for other development needs. An important urban development project near Malé, which started in 1997, will therefore provide reclaimed land for developing a new urban centre, which will address the pressing housing needs of the capital.

Since the shortage of land is one of the main problems facing the country, an effective land law that will address urban development needs is required. It is for this reason that the Government has drafted a new land law which is presently in the process of approval by the Parliament. This new land law will strengthen the law as it relates to issues such as mortgages, strata titling and the buying and selling of land, which will pave way for creating a healthy housing market.

Housing finance is another important aspect of housing policy to which the Government of Maldives has given priority. The Government firmly believes that, in order to find a sustainable solution to the housing problem, it is necessary to develop a proper financing mechanism. At present, loans are taken under commercial loan conditions with short payback periods and high interest rates. The pilot project on housing finance now being carried out will therefore be the first step towards a comprehensive housing finance system.

Maldives is also working on the Urban Observatory Programme, with the support of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). Through this programme, urban indicators will be continuously updated, thus helping the country to formulate policies that will be more effective in addressing issues of urban development and shelter.

These are some important areas that the Government of Maldives is working on in addressing the Habitat Agenda. While the task ahead is challenging, the Government firmly believes that the present work of creating the proper framework will pay off in the long term, and it is committed to a sustainable human settlements policy.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kamil Baialinov, Chairman of the delegation of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Baialinov (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): With regard to the sustainable development of human settlements, the Government of Kyrgyzstan is focusing on the interests of the people, because that is what underlies our actions in implementing the Habitat Agenda. Housing difficulties are among the most acute social problems in the Kyrgyz Republic. To resolve

these problems, a housing construction programme covering the period to 2010 has been worked out, and this will be implemented in accordance with the instructions of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. The main objective of the Republic's housing programme policy is to provide accessible housing to the citizens through the creation of mechanisms to attract both domestic and foreign investment in housing construction, strengthening legislation and the housing market infrastructure and making full use of the capacity of construction enterprises and related manufacturers.

Today, Kyrgyzstan is one of the lowest-ranking industrially developed countries in the provision of housing, and has an average of 12.9 square metres of floor space per person. Furthermore, the housing shortage has worsened in recent years because of the disastrous reduction in the volume of housing construction caused by overall economic decline and an acute reduction in State financing and the income of the population. The number of people in need of housing is growing yearly — the figure now stands at more than 166,000 families — and that increase is linked to a drop in the construction of new residential units in all regions of the Republic and to the difficulties of establishing new mechanisms for financing housing through mortgages and loans.

The delegation of Kyrgyzstan acknowledges that the mobilization of domestic resources and a rational national policy are essential for resolving problems associated with housing and human settlements and that the main responsibility for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda lies with the Government. However, international support is also very important. The serious financial difficulties and the complex nature of the problems involved in housing construction will require a programmatic approach commensurate with the scale of the problem, whose resolution is of great importance for the social and economic development of Kyrgyzstan. We will need to draw on the experience of countries throughout the world and will require international cooperation and assistance from international organizations. Such assistance will be particularly welcome in connection with the forthcoming International Year of Mountains, which is to be celebrated in 2002 within the framework of the United Nations. For Kyrgyzstan, which is a mostly mountainous country, it is particularly important to provide social and economic support for the population in mountainous regions and to ensure that standards of living meet international standards for developed regions.

On behalf of the delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic, I should once again like to reaffirm our desire to implement the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. These documents will continue to serve as the basic starting point for our actions to ensure the sustainable development of human settlements. In this connection, Kyrgyzstan welcomes the new strategic vision of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and its stress on two Global Campaigns, to guarantee home ownership and to ensure rational urban governance — strategic factors in ensuring international cooperation as it relates to the provision of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development.

Kyrgyzstan also welcomed the creation of the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities and its contribution to the work of Habitat in preparing for this special session. Kyrgyzstan attaches importance to activities designed to bring countries with transitional economies into a system of multifaceted cooperation in the field of sustainable human settlements development. This can be done by strengthening the support and involvement of the United Nations, financial institutions, international and national funds, the private sector and other partners in the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken at the 1st plenary meeting, I now give the floor to Ms. Narelle Townsend, President of the NGO Committee on Human Settlements.

Ms. Townsend (NGO Committee on Human Settlements): It is a distinct honour to be able to address the Assembly today as President of the NGO Committee on Human Settlements and Co-Coordinator of the International Facilitating Group for NGOs, which was established for Habitat II at Istanbul and was reinstated in Nairobi during the preparatory process. More than 2,500 non-governmental organizations have been accredited to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), many of them representing grass-roots organizations. Perhaps more than any of the United Nations conferences of the 1990s, and because of the all-encompassing nature of Habitat issues, we are hearing the people's voices. They are tired of being referred to as the "dollar per

day" workers by pundits of the international aid industry. The conservative estimate of 1.3 billion persons in need of improved shelter should remind us that degraded living environments and enforced homelessness are inexcusable conditions at this stage of our collective human development.

As for the expectations of the Habitat Agenda, we have come a long way from the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements and the Vancouver action plan of the first Habitat Conference, in 1976, but the glaring disparities in economic and social opportunities in human settlements mentioned then continue to be persistent issues worldwide.

During Habitat II, many participants acknowledged that living conditions had not improved during the preceding generation for the vast majority of the world's poorer inhabitants and that the expanding slums and squatter settlements were testimony to the pervasive deterioration of environmental and socio-economic conditions. The Conference's deliberations led to the Habitat Agenda, with its recommendations for action under two main themes: affordable housing for all, and sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world. Non-governmental organization members of this Committee have initiated research projects, have participated in relevant community events and continue to render volunteer technical services towards realizing goals of the Habitat Agenda, especially at the local level.

The aforementioned two themes of Habitat were augmented by two Global Campaigns — the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure and the Global Campaign on Urban Governance. The NGO Committee is preparing a compendium of cases of secure tenure from examples worldwide as our contribution to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Members are participating in best practices projects, a current series of workshops being undertaken by the World Bank group and the United Nations relating to urban governance, especially those focused on financing for urban development.

The NGO Committee on Human Settlements cooperates with other organizations in providing information on all aspects of the Habitat Agenda and underscores the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements' collaboration with international initiatives to reduce poverty — for example, the Urban Management Programme with the United Nations Development Programme and the Sustainable Cities Programme with the United Nations Environment Programme. Several members are involved in United Nations system-wide anti-poverty strategies and their links to private sector partnerships, particularly for the creation of better livelihoods and the quest for affordable shelter.

We are encouraged by the response of Member States to General Assembly resolution 55/194 of 20 December 2000, which called, in section V, paragraph 1, for the "inclusion of partner groups in broad-based, gender-balanced national delegations". However, many non-governmental organizations have been disappointed by actions taken during the preparatory process which sought to impede their role as partners with Habitat, one of the unique features of this process which had been approved at the Conference in Istanbul. We are also concerned about the hard line taken by some Member States in connection with people's right to shelter — a right already enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, and reaffirmed in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. We are convinced that the right to decent living conditions applied to all citizens will not adversely affect the economies of concerned countries, but, rather, add to the value and assets of the communities involved and have a beneficial multiplier effect on the capacities and resources of poor men, and even poorer women.

In the United Nations system, particularly in Habitat, we would like to participate in more research on regulatory reforms. We are aware of the manner in which restrictive or costly regulations impede the provision of affordable housing, marginalize communities from planning and decision-making bodies, circumscribe certain livelihoods and devalue the participation of the poor in activities affecting the quality of their lives.

In conclusion, we remain committed to the goals of the Habitat Agenda, subscribe to the principles in the draft declaration on cities and look forward to continued collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. We would like to extend our thanks and deep appreciation to the Executive Director for her generous support and the kind cooperation of her staff in making it possible for the NGO Committee and the International Facilitating Group for NGOs to

convene the NGO Forum. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those Member States that honoured us with a briefing.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements made in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Kochazian (Armenia): It was not the intention of my delegation to enter into polemics, but the statement made by the Azerbaijani delegation has provoked us to do so. In that statement, the Azerbaijani representative made groundless and absurd allegations.

As to the terms used, I would like to mention that the whole international community is well aware of who was the real initiator of aggression against the Armenian population residing in many cities, towns and settlements of Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh.

Today Armenia is still suffering from the 10-year blockade imposed by Azerbaijan. As a result of aggressive actions by that country, more than 12,000 houses were damaged and ruined. Seventy-eight educational centres, 62 medical-care posts, 515 kilometres of potable water pipelines, 724 kilometres of irrigation pipelines and 575 kilometres of road are in need of reconstruction and repair. Many villages along the border in various Armenian provinces suffered from artillery fire.

We regret that the Azerbaijani delegation has chosen to embark on such a destructive approach, just when the heads of State of both countries have resumed their efforts to create solid ground for a comprehensive settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

We call on the Azerbaijani delegation to refrain from such behaviour and to show respect for the mandate of this special session.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): This afternoon the Israeli representative made a statement before this special session. That statement is a heap of distortions and a misrepresentation of facts. Of course, as the Israeli Minister of Construction and Housing, he is the Minister responsible for the establishment of illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territories. He is the one who, about 10 days ago, announced very enthusiastically the building of new housing units in two settlements, in spite of his Government's claim that it had approved the Mitchell report. In short, he is the Minister responsible for the crime of war, for Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The relocation by the occupying forces of its residents to the occupied territories and the violation by those forces of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and of many Security Council and General Assembly resolutions constitute war crimes, according to Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions and according to the International Criminal Court.

The crimes committed by Israel in the area of housing and human settlements are not confined to the occupied Palestinian territories. Indeed, Israel is engaged in large-scale housing construction on land usurped and stolen from the Palestinians. Israel, according to the United Nations Conciliation Committee, has confiscated about 5.5 million dunums that are privately owned by Palestinian citizens who have been refugees since 1948.

But Israel is not only preventing those people from returning to their homes and lands, not only rejecting relevant United Nations resolutions — it is also refusing to acknowledge Palestinian land ownership and is illegally confiscating that land through, inter alia, the establishment of housing settlements thereon.

Since last year, Israel, the occupying force, has been carrying out a bloody military campaign against the Palestinian people, in the course of which it has committed many war crimes and acts of State terrorism, including the deliberate killing of many of the 500 Palestinians who were martyred during that period.

The root of the problem is the continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories through settlement activities, even after considerable progress in the peace process and in spite of all international efforts.

The Palestinian side is now seriously undertaking numerous efforts with many parties, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation,

with a view to putting an end to the current tragedy and in order to implement the recommendations contained in the Mitchell report and the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative.

All we can hope for now is that Israel is sincere in its approval of the Mitchell report and that it will immediately commence implementation of the steps to be undertaken in accordance with that report.

Unfortunately, what we have heard today does not augur well. Nevertheless, we have not lost hope.

Mr. Zaki (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have listened to the statement made by the representative of Israel at the beginning of this meeting and were not surprised by its contents, which, unfortunately, are totally irrelevant to the subject matter.

Israel refuses to admit that its occupation of Palestinian territories, its resettlement of Jewish immigrants from all parts of the world on Palestinian and Arab lands, and its confiscation of the land under occupation is the main reason for the tragedy and loss of life suffered by both the Palestinian and the Israeli people.

Israeli settlement activities in the territories occupied by Israel by military force are illegal and unlawful under the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. No matter how much the representatives of Israel try to dress up the ugly facts or to mislead international public opinion by speaking of terrorism and not occupation, all those desperate attempts will fail.

The Israeli settlers spread violence and call for it. They burn Palestinian crops. Houses are being built for them on occupied and confiscated Arab lands. Their settlements become military citadels that target Palestinian civilians. The presence of those settlers in the occupied territories is a crime in and of itself.

The international community must take a unified and firm stand to bring pressure to bear on Israel to stop its settlement activities immediately. The continuation of these activities under the protection of the occupation forces and Israel's refusal to respect the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people are the real reasons for the current unbearable suffering of the Palestinians, and the suffering of the Israelis as well.

The meeting rose at 7.15 p.m.